

[21:12] Lady Nephelia de Durendaire | As the day faded to afternoon in the snow-swept reaches of Ishgard, the Empyreum was ever alive with the bustle of daily life in Ishgard; And perhaps no sound was more endemic of Ishgard than the sound of steel and combat. A pair of duelists clashed in the training yard of a noble's dueling club. The elder was a middle-aged elezen man with noble's finery and knight's bearing; clearly a practiced duelist, and perhaps one even Elias would know as a well regarded instructor. The younger, of course, was a familiar half-elezen woman with the crest of Durendaire ever emblazoned on her breast and the same rapier she ever carried- or at least, a blunted replica of the same sword she favoured. She stood poised and controlled, her off-hand bent across the small of her back; a clear replication of a style once favoured by a sword-saint of eld though not exactly commonly taught. The instructor lunged towards her and she sidestepped gracefully, a clanging beat-parry from the half-elezen knocking the instructor's rapier off line. Her expression was determined and focused even as exertion beaded on her brow. Riposte met a well-recovered blade, and within a few exchanges of the back-and-forth of the duel the pair found themselves locked in a bind that saw the pair fighting for positioning neither would give. No points struck, and the pair unbound and stepped back to recover, Nephelia's rapier immediately leveling in a high guard that protected against the taller fighter's range, perhaps, but to a practiced eye left her center woefully exposed as she panted to catch her breath. The instructor lunged forward, longer stride offering a farther reach than Nephelia could hope to contend with as the rapier shot forward... only for her to step aside and drop her own sword into a hanging parry as she pivoted around him. The spinning step continued until she'd turned near fully away from him, and her sword thrust behind her under her sword arm and beside her waist. The strike was solid, and as Nephelia spun back and uncoiled the thrust, it was into a defending downwards cut leveled at his throat. The man stood and the pair was quiet as swords slowly lowered, save the laboured breaths of exertion. "Well done, Lady Nephelia," he said, bowing his head respectfully as the young noblewoman's focused expression broke into a relieved smile.

[21:38] Ser Elias de Spencer pauses next to open gate, his task around the corner finished and the familiar sound of steel clashing having drawn his attention during an idle moment. Initially, he recognized neither of the duelists, but drawing nearer revealed one to be far more familiar than expected. Quietly, feet take him only to the training ground's open gate, no foot past the threshold where he hadn't been wholly invited to spectate. Steel ringing out drew any eye, but feedback was something politely welcomed from only a select few, and there was little doubt that any commentary from him toward a Durendaire would be met with scathing reproach. Brows pinch together briefly at the use of a high guard, and then lift at the reveal that it was simply bait. It was more devious than he'd expected of the tiny noble; yet it was oddly fitting, upon reexamination. "How long have you been fencing, Lady Nephelia?" His voice is raised just high enough to be heard over the sounds of the city and wind, drawing the curious eye of the instructor who receives a polite nod of recognition and respect from the Temple Knight.

[21:50] Lady Nephelia de Durendaire | As the instructor looked over at Elias and responded with a nod in turn, so too did the tiny noblewoman. She startled a moment in the way one might from seeing a person they hadn't expected, and then smiled. "Ser Elias!" she replied, "Ah- a moment." She turned back to her instructor and made certain they were done for the day, before sheathing her sword. The instructor handed her a waterskin from the table, and her glasses, and then offered a respectful bow to the woman. He glanced between her and the temple knight that she'd clearly recognized, and though he did make certain she was contented to be left on her own... he did then retrieve his own gear and depart. Mainly so the writer wouldn't have to write him or come up with a name for him until inevitably pressed. Then the Durendaire turned back to Elias, "My Lord Father has provided me a number of tutors and mentors in martial and magical arts since I was a girl," She replied thoughtfully, then chuckled sheepishly, "Once he and mother had determined I'd not fain cease my begging."

[22:01] Ser Elias de Spencer nods, almost sagely, as if her answer hadn't provided anything unexpected in the least. With coiffers like that, there were few tutors and mentors in the world that would pass up sharing their knowledge, and no blame for such priority could be found from the mercantile heir. "I see. I suppose that makes it all the more impressive if you've only been learning for a couple turns, in that case. You're incredibly talented, My Lady." Delivered with all seriousness, the corner of his mouth betrays the jest at the last moment, curling upward at the tease before being fought back down into mock gravity.

[22:14] Lady Nephelia de Durendaire beamed at Elias for a moment before taking a sip of her water and wiping her brow on her handkerchief, for a moment before... She blinked as she recognized the jest, and caught his words. Her freckled cheeks reddened and she furrowed her brow, "It has been more than a couple!" she retorted indignantly, settling a hand on her hip, before continuing, "It has been nearly a decade." As if that actually did anything to disprove his point, given she was talking to a man with nearly more experience in knighthood than she had of... well, life, really. She huffed softly, before her practiced smile returned, "But thank you, Ser Elias. I would ill be a daughter of Durendaire if I knew not how to wield a blade."

[22:28] Ser Elias de Spencer lets the smug grin of triumph spread across his face as she reacts, getting a significantly more solid answer from her as an added bonus. "Oh, don't give me that false smile. Ten turns makes far more sense to be able to pull one over on Instructor Cocault, and that baiting was clever." He folds his arms as he leans against the cold iron of the gate, the smile falling into something more genuine as he gives her an appraising look. "Well done." A rare bit of sincere warmth, he dips his head in a low nod of acknowledgement.

[22:39] Lady Nephelia de Durendaire blinked at him as he both complimented her swordplay and called her on her facade. The break in her expression was only for a moment, before it settled into a softer and more genuine smile. "... Thank you, Ser Elias. Truly." She glanced at him a moment as he leaned on the gate, as if briefly considering questioning if he was comfortable. But she said nothing and turned back to the table of weaponry to retrieve hers. The rapier whose design the blunted training sword's was swapped onto her hip as she unbuckled the sheath from the sword belt and attached the real one, and then the training sword was put into a silken bag along with a pair of longswords. The grimoire she always carried was as well plucked from the table and buckled to her belt along her back. "Instructor Ilsoix is a masterful duelist," she said, glancing at Elias as she packed up for the trip home, "'Twas a privilege to be afforded the chance to train with him." She seemed fatigued from practice, clearly, but also... not in so terrible shape that she couldn't maintain the practiced grace and poise one might expect from a woman of her station. As she turned back to Elias and slung the satchel of swords over her shoulder, she settled her glasses back on instead of risking her eyedrops wearing off on the walk home. "What brings you this way, Ser Elias? I'd not thought to chance into you."

[22:53] Ser Elias de Spencer tilts his head in the direction from which he'd approached, toward a small handful of nearby artisans. "There is a smith around here that I wanted to commission for a set of daggers for my ward — mine very nearly look like short swords in her hands, and she needs something that fits her better." At nearly half his height, the disproportion of the blades in Celeste's hands had nearly sent him into a fit of laughter, and a more fitting set was long overdue. "I must also admit, I've not seen you in these parts, either, and it is most certainly a surprise to meet. Has Cocault been teaching in this location for very long? I thought he'd kept his lessons at the Lightfeather Training Grounds." Pushing off from the gate, he turns to offer his less-armored arm to her, as though there weren't a question as to what his role was about to be.

[23:08] Lady Nephelia de Durendaire shook her head as she adjusted the bag of swords over her back to be comfortable, before moving towards the gate and peeking towards where he gestured to the artisans. "Oh, I see," she replied thoughtfully, "Were you able to find one, Ser Elias?" She asked,

"Our manor's smiths oft make the arms for our knights, though my Lord Father has rare commissioned other master craftsmen for some pieces of our own." As if the opulent rapier at her hip didn't immediately give that away itself. She took the offered arm with little thought, the practiced ritual of Lady and Knight already well ingrained in her. "And I admit, I didn't much question why Instructor Ilsoix asked to meet here; I'd just wanted an evening of training with an instructor other than the manor's own."

[23:20] Ser Elias de Spencer dips his chin in brief affirmation of her first question — and he'd little doubt that the Durendaire House kept their own retinue of smiths and armorers aplenty — but he goes quiet as he ponders the reasoning behind the Instructor's change of location. For a few yalms, the only sound is booted feet against stone, metal and hard leather tapping in synchronization as he leads back toward the heart of The Pillars. "Has he mentioned knowing anyone in the area? That is a dueling club, after all, so it wouldn't surprise me in the least to know he either knows the owner or offers lessons there, as well."

[23:26] Lady Nephelia de Durendaire walked alongside Elias in the same silence as he offered after her response- honestly thankful for the chance to breathe and recover from the exertion of a few bells of practice. Her face was slowly losing the tinge of exertion, and the handkerchief had dried it before braving the chill. But her hair, once likely a painstakingly elegant up-do, was... less than composed, one might say. Not that she had a mirror or the desire to try to fix it. At his next question, Nephelia simply quirked a brow thoughtfully, "I believe he offers other lessons, here," she replied, "Or at least has other students who attend. Though I admit, I have not trained with him often and much of our own conversations were on our own duels... and my steward handled organizing the meeting for me."

[23:41] Ser Elias de Spencer makes a sound that might be either a thoughtful hum or a noise of acceptance — both would be apt responses to her words. While he'd expected some sort of knowledge on the matter, it still provided no surprise that she was equally ignorant as to why the man chose a duelist's club over the safety of the Durendaire courtyards; but perhaps familiarity had been the reason alone. "You do not speak with your instructors outside of lessons or practice?" A slightly odd choice, given how much time is spent with either, but perhaps there had been reasons for keeping such distance from tutors.

[23:47] Lady Nephelia de Durendaire shook her head, gesturing slightly with her free hand, "With ones I train with more frequently I do," She replied, "though... many prefer simply speaking of the task at hand. Instructor Ilsoix is one I do not train with particularly often, I just... thought 'twould be nice to duel someone other than our own." She explained. Ah, perhaps that explained it? The girl had trained with a number of various instructors, it seemed, rather than form any lasting bond with one. In a way, that captured much of her life.

[23:58] Ser Elias de Spencer mulls this over for several steps, allowing thoughtful silence to again allow for breath to be caught as they climb stone steps. In both what she had and hadn't quite said, there was much to be gleaned. Multiple instructors, many of which that spoke only of the lesson at hand and not how it applied in their student's life? The young half-elezen's actions and outlook became more clear with every new conversation they held. "Which has been your favourite? For dueling, and for connection?" The second is added in a tiny pry for information, and he glances down at the diminutive blonde.

[00:08] Lady Nephelia de Durendaire took the chance to do exactly as offered, a slight pause in her step to catch her breath at the top of the stairs as the crisp chill of the Coerthan air bit at fatigued lungs. She glanced around as she walked through the city, almost the picture of a sheltered princess exploring her kingdom as a rare treat from a storybook. But she wasn't, and this wasn't. She was just another spoiled noble brat who hid away in a manor and never needed to deal with the

masses. But at Elias' question she paused to consider it, then smiled- she likely already had the answer known, given how wide she smiled, but tried to look like she was thinking to at least maintain the polite facade. "Inquisitor Rikke was a masterful duelist," she replied, "She's descended from the Swordsaint Allisandre, and as I know the only person who still practices Her style save what I learned from Inquisitor Rikke." She glanced down at her sword, gesturing her free hand towards it, then back to Elias. "My rapier is modeled after the Saint's Holy Relic that the Inquisitor still carries." notably had not mentioned 'connection' at all; just commentary on skill and lineage. And Elias might recognize the inquisitor's name; a woman known for a heart as cold as Coerthan winter and ruthlessness to rival the Fury herself. And also, of course, another half-elezen. She'd been missing for some time, though; so only the Fury would know where her path had lead after the dragonsong.

[00:27] Ser Elias de Spencer pauses alongside her, patient as she takes a moment to enjoy the view and following the cast gaze out over the rooftops and spires of their city. Picturesque in the warm afternoon light, it was a sight that lent to days long past when the land wasn't made harsh and unyielding by ice. The thought flickers of curiosity as to whether Nephelia might remember what Ishgard looked like before the endless snow and ice, and is just as quickly dismissed — there was little need to bring up what was lost. Her answer, however, draws a flicker of a frown before he quickly smooths it away; present company needn't know his opinion on the frigid and compassionless Inquisitor. However, "Inquisitor Rikke was your closest connected instructor, of all of them?"

[00:34] Lady Nephelia de Durendaire she turned back to him as they walked, her quiet gazing over the city and its people seemingly done for now. Back into her own world, and own conversation. She considered the question and then offered the forced, sheepish smile of someone having to correct an assumption, "She taught me much," She replied, "But... I suppose we were not close. She spoke of little beside our training, but... was always kind to me, I suppose." she gestured excitedly as her expression lit up, "She let me practice with the Saint's Relic when I asked nicely, once." She said, with the soft girlish giggle of someone recalling a fond childhood memory, "'Twas truly a masterful weapon, even after so many centuries. Even my own compares not to it."

[00:45] Ser Elias de Spencer allows his expression to soften as she opens up in her excitement to speak on someone she very clearly admired. Eyes glance down at the weapon upon her hip as she references it, ornate guard nigh all he can truly see of the sword at present. "You speak fondly of her, and I admittedly cannot name another who might do so. She was so kind to you that she stood out amongst all the rest?" There is genuine curiosity in the question, and his pace slows a touch as his attention shifts more to the answer than their shared route.

[00:53] Lady Nephelia de Durendaire considered the question as they walked, furrowing her brow. "Truly?" She asked, "Was she so disliked?" She settled into silence for a time, before continuing, "I suppose the others were not unkind either, though I trained with many of them less. Like I said, Inquisitor Rikke spoke little of aught beyond our training. But she was never unkind to me." She, too, didn't seem to be paying *too* much attention to their route, frequently used to trusting her escorts to lead her where she was intending to go- and likely often used to not being able to see the path in general. "And I'd not had an instructor who was half-elezen." she was quiet for a moment, and then shook her head, "I suppose I was not particularly close with any of my instructors. Inquisitor Rikke just taught me much, is all."

[01:05] Ser Elias de Spencer nods at her answer and goes quiet, refocusing on their path and glancing around for the telltale bells that would signify the demarcation of her House's district. A few yalms more of silence in quiet contemplation, and a thought occurs. "You have been tutored in the Healing arts." It is not a question, but lilted almost into one. "What were some things you found difficult

about learning them?" There is both personal and ulterior interest in the young Durendaire's response.

[01:11] Lady Nephelia de Durendaire blinked at the question after the period of silence, following along as they moved through the city and back towards the districts that would lead to the Durendaire-Minor Castle. "I have, yes; they were among the first I was tutored in." She replied, as would have not been uncommon for young noblewomen. The follow-up, however, gave her more pause- and it may well have been that she affirmed her tutelage just to buy herself time to better think of a reply- or find words for it, as she didn't seem to hesitate overmuch on the answer. She smiled softly, and then canted her head, "I suppose... I have never quite come to accept that even with them, I'll not be able to help everyone." she admitted with a sheepish chuckle. "Or perhaps that some things needn't be bothered to be healed. I see little reason to let one suffer when I might offer succor."

[01:25] Ser Elias de Spencer glances down when she is silent longer than expected, but hums a true noise of affirmation upon her answer. "Some things are simply too much to ask of a body, yes, but I suppose I hadn't given overmuch thought to the toll it might take upon the one who cannot knit back what is beyond reasonable repair." Memories flash through his mind, unbidden, but are there and gone as scene after scene looks too familiar and blends together with similar ones. Red across snow, red staining fangs, red staining the blue of banners laid fallen across those who'd borne them high. The images are let go as quickly as they'd appeared. "We were often told that a simple bruise or a clean break or shallow cut was not worth the attention of a Conjurer, as they could be healed naturally with time and proper care." It hadn't stopped the less resilient from pestering the Conjurers for relief anyways, much to the chagrin of their superior officers. "But do you recall anything during your studies themselves that you wish might have been made easier if something had been different?"

[01:31] Lady Nephelia de Durendaire nodded thoughtfully, gaze falling downcast as she thought it over. She had not nearly the same breadth of experience as he, but still she had her share of memories of white gloves stained red, of life ebbing and slipping through her fingers only to be but barely caught at the brink. She didn't speak of them, of course; she never did. But she turned back to Elias and smiled broadly at him- not entirely forced, of course, but she wasn't in quite as bright of a mood as it would otherwise appear, "Well, that was when we were at war, Ser Elias. And now we are not. So! Should you ever be in need of healing, I should be most happy to oblige." She was earnest in the offer, if... entirely oblivious to the fact that he'd likely never dream of taking it. Still, she'd likely fuss over him if she found out, like she had before. Truly a wonder that the frigid Holy See had fostered so gentle hearted a girl; but then, he could likely guess how such a thing came to pass. But his last question was met with a curious and searching gaze, "... Why do you ask, Ser Elias?"

[01:52] Ser Elias de Spencer cants his head in visible thought and consideration of her return question, noticing that it hadn't been answered but debating as to whether his response might provide any clarity. In the end, he relents. "My courter is learning Conjury from a Gridanian, and I have been curious to know what the process might be like, or what obstacles she might face that could potentially be made lesser or circumvented altogether with any bit of assistance." There is an openness to the answer, a tentative honesty that tests the trust put in place with its revelation.

[02:00] Lady Nephelia de Durendaire paused in surprise at the response, a half-beat pause that made her almost miss a step before playing it off slightly poorly as stumbling on a stone and righting herself quickly thereafter. She looked back to the way they were walking, using her free hand to nudge her glasses back into place and then adjust the bag of swords on her back. When she responded, her first words were quick until they eventually settled to her usual cadence, "Gridanian conjury is a touch different than the Ishgardian conjury I learned, and that greater still than the Seers' arts of ancient Ivalice," Ah, yes, it was still Nephelia of course. "If one is familiar with

employing personal aether for magical manipulations, then 'twould possibly be more difficult to grow comfortable with conjury... 'tis an art that uses far more of oneself than it returns if done improperly." she explained, "Though I had a number of tomes I studied when I was not learning with tutors- ah... perhaps I could find some in the manor library for her? I-if that is something that might be of aid, I mean."

[02:21] Ser Elias de Spencer immediately slows as she seems to stumble, eyebrows tilting in unspoken apology for the clear surprise given. Had what he said truly been so unsettling..? The mental note is made to perhaps return to sharing less about his personal life, if she were so averse to hearing about it. When she had regained her footing, he continues on tentatively until she seems to settle once more. At the unexpected offer, however, he withholds his knee-jerk response and is quiet for another handful of steps. "If.. they are copies meant for lending, then.. I would be most grateful for any assistance... that could be provided." The words are picked carefully, as though navigating an unusual political chessboard. The politely rejected gift of a former Stablemaster's journal came to the forefront of memory, and the stipulation needed to be made clear.

[02:27] Lady Nephelia de Durendaire considered the question, before shaking her head, "They are not per se, but none of them would be difficult to acquire additional copies of, or have penned." She replied, her usual cheerfulness returning. She didn't seem nearly so worried about the political landmines she was throwing him into, but then... she never really did. She was a spoiled heiress who did whatever she wanted, and often left it to other people to deal with the problems of those choices. Even if she often meant well. She was quiet for a while, then glanced at Elias, and then back to the path as she adjusted her glasses again, "So... your courter..." she started, "How did you... ah... meet?" she asked awkwardly, as if half way between curious, hesitant, and also DEEPLY uncertain how to navigate any sort of social situation any deeper than polite greetings at parties she didn't want to be at. She was pretty sure that was the question you were supposed to ask... Nephelia didn't really read too many romance novels, nor would she admit that her only inkling of how to handle such a situation would come from supporting characters in those stories.

[02:41] Ser Elias de Spencer narrows his eyes at her answer, making another mental note to speak with someone who might be better versed in the confidentiality of the tomes she was offering before accepting any for borrowing. As he mentally leafs through the collateral he might be able to offer, her follow-up question takes him by enough surprise that his heel scuffs the ground hard mid-step as he flinches at its unanticipated existence in the world. So thrown by her hesitant interest is he that she earns a long, appraising look for her inquiry before he chalks it up to polite interest. The next hurdle is how to answer her question in the first place, as the truth didn't sound nearly so glamorous, but the details regarding the beginning of the relationship were certainly not ones he could share so freely. "I.. was on patrol around The Last Vigil, and she recognized me from a joust in which I'd recently placed. She'd kindly sent each of the riders and our birds a thoughtful care package, and asked how I was faring." He pauses again, choosing to gloss over a great many details. "We've grown closer ever since." Eyes to not look to her for her response, unsure if he was sharing too much already.

[02:46] Lady Nephelia de Durendaire glanced down as his heels scuffed against the stone, and there was a slight tensing of the arm that held his that implied she might have worried she did something wrong. She settled as he steadied himself, but still had that look about her of someone who was dreadfully afraid they'd made a mistake. She nodded along as he explained more, though with the same awkwardly quickened pace as she sometimes spoke when nervous or uncertain, "Oh, yes that... sounds quite lovely." She replied, "And was very kind of her. The-... care packages, I mean." she glanced down at the ground ahead of her as she walked, while she absently adjusted her sword belt with her free hand. "I am certain Gestalt was thrilled, at least."

[03:02] Ser Elias de Spencer further regains his composure as she seems to take his response at face value and not pry for details he struggled to even put into words in the first place. "He was. And.. she was. I'm not sure Ges even tasted that apple, but he was thrilled nonetheless." Unintentional warmth again starts to thread through his words as the dark blue bird is mentioned. "And Pepper has been far more kind and thoughtful than deserved, but that compassion is admirable." He doesn't notice the smile that starts to tug at the corners of his mouth as he finally mentions her name. "She'd written to each of us participants, and there hadn't at all been a need for such effort, but it was.. endearing."

[03:12] Lady Nephelia de Durendaire glanced up at Elias as he spoke of both Ges, and then the courter whose name Nephelia had now learned. She smiled slightly- though in the practiced way she did of hiding behind the noblewoman's mask. She was quiet for a time after that, as if uncertain how to respond. "I am glad, Ser Elias." she replied, eventually. A lot of time spent thinking over such a simple statement, but she fell back into silence for a short ways down the road thereafter. She wasn't certain what to say; it wasn't a situation she was particularly versed in, nor were they close enough for the girl to inquire further. And whatever other thoughts played in her head as she looked around the city as they walked was unclear. The lack of social grace in this instance was an almost stark contrast against her usually precisely honed demeanor. She glanced at him again as they walked, and then away quickly thereafter as he smiled. "Lady Pepper... sounds... quite lovely." She settled on eventually, as if that was the best she could come up with in between all of her lack of ability to relate, uncertainty of what to ask, and whatever else. Awkward critter, but she was doing her best.

[03:25] Ser Elias de Spencer didn't see the polite smile, but certainly heard it in her responses. The ghost of a smile dissipates as he glances back down at her, realizing that perhaps he had still managed to overshare; or rather, that he hadn't shared something that sounded nearly so exciting or properly romantic to a young woman. Brows gently pinch together and his mouth twists into an apologetic smile. "My apologies, My Lady, I am not adept at spinning a simple meeting into a titillating tale. I don't intend to bore you with such mundane happenings." Truly, the initial meeting had none of the devastating revelations of love at first sight, nor were their first couple meetings so life-altering that they warranted much more than passing mention. The devilish details of the long talk he'd shared with Pepper held all the most scandalous aspects, but he was not nearly so comfortable on an escorting walk to casually share the more damning news.

[03:31] Lady Nephelia de Durendaire 's eyes widened as she startled at the apology, and she looked up at him again and shook her head quickly, "No, no, Ser Elias. 'Tis naught to apologize for!" she assured him, before forcing an awkward chuckle as she looked back at the path. "... I... ah... have little experience with courting, myself. And I am... uncertain what to say, or..." she trailed off into silence. either lacking the words to say what she was thinking- or unwilling to say them. Both potentially likely, but her admissions did seem earnest and genuine. "I suppose this is the sort of thing one would oft speak of with their friends, yes?" she asked, before chuckling again and adjusting her sword belt, "Ah... so... does she make you happy? Do you enjoy the time with her?" Oh she was trying so, so very hard, even if she now refused to look back at Elias. She reached up as if to take off her glasses, paused, nudged them back into place, and then let her arm fall limply back at her side as they walked.

[20:15] Ser Elias de Spencer slows his pace, still watching her expression as it went through its obstacle course of emotions. While it was certainly... *unusual* to be speaking of this topic with the High House member, the awkwardness of her responses serves better as a reminder that the young woman's social circles were still terribly stunted, and that hadn't seemed to change since they'd last spoken about it. "It's hard to say that she makes me 'happy', as it has only been a month since we began courting. But I do enjoy spending time with her, yes." The confirmation seems safe enough

while also remaining true, and innocuous enough for someone so obviously new to the idea of relationships outside of familial ones.

[20:25] Lady Nephelia de Durendaire listened quietly to the knight's answer, large sapphire eyes fixed on him. Eventually she nodded slowly. There was a thoughtfulness to the gesture, before it steadied into something less hesitant. Her smile returned, though whether it was forced and fake or genuine was, in this moment, difficult to discern. "Good, then full glad am I to hear, Ser Elias." she replied; a little overly stiff and formal for what should've been a relatively casual- if personal- conversation. "I pray it continues to be so... ah... I-if 'tis not too much to say." she chuckled sheepishly and then quieted, looking away from him again towards the road.

[20:34] Ser Elias de Spencer meets that gaze evenly, still watching as her expression shifts and changes. Interesting. "Generally that what's commonly shared, at least to those to whom you'd like to receive such sentiments. Already the rumor mill has made plans of how I'll either dishonor or abandon her, but it is nice to hear something more mild and polite, at least." His tone lifts as though he's sharing something as casual as the weather, chin lifting to watch where they're going.

[20:41] Lady Nephelia de Durendaire simply nodded along, her smile gentle as they walked towards the pillars. Though a dark cloud passes over her expression at mention of the 'rumour mill', her smile downturning into the slightest pout. She shook her head, the messy ponytail bobbing. "Perish the thought!" She retorted, "Far be it from me to say aught of the sort, and pay the rumours no mind besides." Though her soft voice never raised from its normal gentleness, the brief tinge of her cheeks afterwards betrayed an embarrassment at her retort. She looked away and breathed a soft, "ah..." before continuing, "I... mean to say 'tis only your twin happiness that matters." she fell back into the silence of a girl realizing she'd far, far deviated the script she knew, and who was clearly trying to discern if she'd made some sort of mistake in that deviation.

[20:58] Ser Elias de Spencer allows the small grin to spread across his mouth at her more spirited counter, a tiny expression of triumph at getting the girl to again react and push a little farther outside of that comfort zone. "The sentiment is appreciated, My Lady. I have yet to pay mind to the rumor mill for its venom, but do try to keep abreast of what's being said so I might be able to either easily disprove it or ensure that more dangerous whispers are kept from circulating and bringing harm to my loved ones." There is a beat of silence as he glances down and see her doubtful expression, and the way it is turned appears more inwardly aimed than outwardly so. "You have yet to say anything untoward or inappropriate, if you happened to be wondering."

[21:10] Lady Nephelia de Durendaire startled slightly at the reassurance, blushing slightly at realizing she'd been so easily read. She chuckled sheepishly and nodded slowly, "I... wasn't certain; I was afraid I might've spoken out of turn." she admitted. She considered his words as they neared the gates out of the Empyreum, and was quiet for a while in her thoughtfulness, "Nevertheless, 'tis noble and chivalrous to keep one's loved ones from harm, even if 'tis only from rumours." She replied. She did, however, quiet after that. Perhaps it was a withdrawal to a more 'proper' distance between a young noblewoman of a High House and a temple knight, but she still wore the same gentle smile as ever.

[19:34] Ser Elias de Spencer lets the silence settle back between them again, silently taking note of the way the pavers change as they near a set of stairs and then shift again when the path evens out. The tactile input isn't needed at present — clearly — but it had been something that was unable to be forgotten or unseen. As the gates of the district come into sight, steps unconsciously slow a fraction as the internal debate begins. His path did not continue into The Pillars, but there was no doubt hers would be aimed toward the section draped in pennants with the Durendaire's golden bells. A notable part of him wants to avoid the High House's district altogether, and he nips at the inside of his lip in thought. Likely, it was best to just keep mentally braced and escort her the full

way, but it might require a bit of doubling back on the chance that someone was watching either of the pair. It's the tiniest sigh of resignation as he resolves himself to the odd path, little more said about his most recent happenings in life as they near the gates and their attendant.

[19:43] Lady Nephelia de Durendaire | Not needed, perhaps, but even Nephelia's footfalls seem to slightly change pace subconsciously when she steps over them- not as much as when she is without her vision, but still some passive acknowledgment of the architectural design that serves often as a sight-aid. She was, of course, entirely unaware of the internal conflict that plagued the knight. His assumption of her path was likely correct, and though he'd never been to the manor she'd so often spoken about- at least likely not with any recognition of it as her home- it wouldn't be hard to imagine where in the Pillars the golden bell's banners flew. Eventually, as they neared the gate and its attendant, Nephelia did briefly turn to look up at Elias. And, if she caught his gaze, would smile as bright as the sun and then turn back to their walk.

[19:52] Ser Elias de Spencer feels the slight movement as she turns to look up, and reactively glances down to see why she'd twisted; one ebon brow arches at the unprompted beam, a flicker of suspicion half-drowned out by the curiosity that arises. "Is there something on your mind..?" He distantly nods to the gate attendant as they pass, attention more fully on the little Halfling who seemed keen on keeping her opinions tempered just so.

[19:58] Lady Nephelia de Durendaire blinked, starting slightly at the question. She shook her head, though did offer a polite smile and wave of her fingers to the attendant as they passed. But her attention shifted back to Elias, "No, Ser Elias!" She replied, "I am simply grateful for the escort home." it seemed... well, true enough. Perhaps there was more she wasn't saying, but she didn't seem to be lying with what she had said. Though, Elias hadn't particularly known her to lie, either.

[20:35] Ser Elias de Spencer studies her for a few steps more, not quite believing those words, but not seeing a reason or right to refute them. The path through the stone paths of the city is generally taken in amicable silence, small nods of acknowledgement or respect given to some few they pass along the way, and gold eyes skimming for unwanted dips or obstacles in the path. When lampposts and pennants start to take on the red and gold of the High House in question, his steps slow and eventually halt. Loosening his hold on where her hand linked to his elbow, a slight step is added for distance and he curves his mouth into a polite smile. "I'll have to part ways with you here, Lady Nephelia, but it has been.. refreshing to speak again." The word seemed to have been considered mid-sentence before openly admitted, and the polite smile turns a touch genuine for just a moment. "Until next time?"

[20:41] Lady Nephelia de Durendaire As they reached the edges of the district owned by the High House, Nephelia- too- slowed as Elias released her arm. Her smile was gentle but faded quickly, "Of course, Ser Elias. Thank you." she said, dipping into a politely shallow curtsy. "It has. I... look forward to when next we meet, and do send Lady Pepper my regards. I shall endeavor to collect literature on conjury from our library- ah... until next time, then." She agreed, before hesitating a moment, and then turning to walk away. Some of the House Knights stationed within the district seemed to notice her before too long, and though there was the expected amount of bowing and greetings, it wasn't long before she had an escort the remainder of the way through the district. And once more, Elias was free of the strange little halfling.