

# Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess Novel

Chapter 101 The True Identity Finished Following the voice, everyone looked to see Piers striding into the pavilion, his brow furrowed, clearly having hurried there. He stepped forward without hesitation, positioning himself protectively in front of Sylvia. Elowen was not surprised to see him. After their chess game, when Cassian had said he would let her meet someone, the person brought in was the guard assigned to protect Sylvia after the visit to Aldric's memorial. That guard had reported that the young man Sylvia met called himself Peres.

He had described the gentleman as handsome, with an air of elegance and fine clothing. Cassian had later told Elowen he had investigated; Piers had indeed gone to the hill that day. The man Sylvia had fallen for was not a merchant, but Piers Leofric, the son of the Duke of Falconcrest. Piers had simply withheld his true identity. Sylvia didn't know. Marwen didn't know. Elowen had planned to reveal this today, but she hadn't anticipated Marwen's early, aggressive arrival. So, you're the paramour?" Marwen's tone was hostile. Piers frowned. "Lady Marwen, mind your words!" Words?

"I'll say what I please! You seduced my daughter, hoping to climb the social ladder through my family, through Duskmoor Manor! Dream on! My daughter is meant for a noble house!" And what of Lady Sylvia's wishes?" Piers retorted. "If she does not desire a 'noble house,' would you force her?" I am her mother! I would never harm her! Even as a concubine to a lord or duke, it would be better than being your legal wife! One look at you tells me you're doomed to an early grave, a man who will never amount to anything..." As Marwen spewed her venom, Piers' frown deepened.

He reached back and gently covered Sylvia's ears. Elowen felt a headache brewing. She could bear it no longer. "Lady Marwen!" Marwen paused briefly. Elowen took a steadying breath. "We have other guests arriving shortly. Lady Sylvia, please retire and tend to your face." Piers understood immediately. Without a word, he guided the weeping Sylvia away. Marwen stared, then shouted, "You two, stop right there!" But they were already gone. She turned back to Elowen, her face twisted with displeasure. "Your Grace, if you bear a grudge against me, take it out on me!"

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Do not ruin my daughter's life like this!" 163 Chapter 101 The True Identity Finisher Elowen spoke deliberately, "I am not ruining her life." "Marrying her off to a merchant isn't ruination?" Marwen scoffed. "If you're so fond of traders, why didn't you beg the King to let you marry one? Instead, you shamelessly wed into Duskmoor Manor!" "Duchess Yvonne has arrived," a servant announced from the doorway. Yvonne entered the pavilion. She was the additional guest Elowen had invited today. She truly wanted to help match this marriage. Marwen's eyes lit up with a scheming glint.

She instantly smoothed her harsh expression and hurried forward. "Yvonne, you've finally arrived!" Yvonne took one look at her and sensed trouble. "What's happened? Has someone wronged you again?" "It's our esteemed Duchess here!" Marwen pretended to dab at non-existent tears. "I merely mentioned that my younger daughter is of marriageable age and hoped she might help find a suitable match. My requirements aren't high-just a family of comparable standing. And what does she do? She tries to marry my girl off to a merchant! Is this not bullying us widows and orphans?" Elowen's frown deepened.

"Her Grace even invited that vagabond to the manor today! He was flaunting himself right before my eyes..." "Lady Marwen!" Elowen reined in her temper. "Mind your language!" Don't say such awful things in front of the man's own mother. Marwen paid her no heed, continuing her lament to Yvonne. "You see? Such airs, forbidding me even to speak." Yvonne patted Marwen's hand sympathetically, then addressed Elowen with a tone of gentle admonishment. "Lady Sylvia is, after all, Lady Marwen's daughter. And the prospective husband would be Lady Marwen's son-in-law.

Surely, you cannot simply silence her and forbid any objection?" Elowen was momentarily at a loss for words. A flash of triumph crossed Marwen's eyes. Yvonne asked, "You've seen this man, then?" Marwen nodded vigorously. "Indeed! Shifty-eyed, the very picture of a scoundrel!

Meeting a young woman in secret without even seeking her parents' permission! In my view, he's likely fatherless and motherless, or born of some low-born mistress!" The words were vile. Even Yvonne couldn't help but frown slightly. But as the man was an outsider, it was no business of hers.

She said casually, "If I had a daughter. I 2/3 2:32 pm ppp. Chapter 101 The True Identity certainly wouldn't marry her into such a family." Finished Encouraged by this agreement, Marwen straightened her spine. An idea sparked in her eyes. "Speaking of which, Yvonne, while you have no daughter, you do have a son, still unmarried, do you not?" Yvonne began to reply, "Yes, he-" The sound of footsteps at the entrance interrupted her. Marwen turned, and her eyes blazed with fresh fury. "You dare show your face again!" Yvonne, cut off mid-sentence, felt a flicker of irritation.

She followed Marwen's gaze and saw her son entering the pavilion. They had been invited together today. For some reason, Piers had been distracted on the journey. He had, unusually, not waited for her after alighting from the carriage, going ahead first. Strangely, he seemed to have arrived even later than she had. ◦ 1.7K admin

Chapter 102 Marwen's Regret Finished Yvonne was about to ask him when the stream of curses from beside her resumed. You fatherless, motherless wretch! How dare you show your face here again!" Yvonne suddenly realized the truth. Her gaze sharpened. "The vagabond you spoke of... is him?" Marwen, momentarily distracted, confirmed, "Yes! Him! Doesn't he just look like a doomed, impoverished wretch?" Yvonne's face instantly darkened. Marwen, her eyes fixed venomously on Piers, failed to notice the change. She continued her interrogation. "You! What is your family name? Where is your home?

Who are your parents?" Piers walked steadily forward until he stood before them. He spoke calmly, "Lady Marwen, my family name is Leofric. My home is on Blessing Lane. My father is the Duke of Falconcrest." Marwen's eyes bulged with shock, her brain struggling to process the words at first. Piers then turned to Yvonne, bowing respectfully. "Mother." Yvonne's face was cold. "Hmph." In that instant, it was as if thunder had crashed directly beside Marwen's ear. Her jaw hung slack. She stood frozen, utterly stupefied. Mother? Mother! He was not a merchant.

He was the son of the Duke of Falconcrest. But what had she just said? Vagabond. Paramour. She had even told Yvonne he must be the son of a low-born mistress... Black spots danced before Marwen's eyes. She nearly fainted on the spot. Then came the crushing wave of regret. So that's why Elowen kept saying he wasn't a merchant, telling me to watch my words. She knew all

along! I just didn't listen... Regret swiftly curdled into a flicker of resentment. 2:32 pm Chapter 102 Marwen's Regret Why couldn't she have just spoken plainly from the start?

After a long moment, Marwen forced her lips into a tremulous smile. "Yvonne..." Yvonne cut her off icily. "We are not that close." Finished Marwen's face contorted. She forced a servile smile. "Y-yes... Your Grace, please don't be angry. I... I was simply overcome with concern for my daughter, speaking nonsense. Please, pay my foolish words no mind..." She glanced at Piers and felt nothing but deep, giddy satisfaction. The sole heir to Falconcrest! The title, the estate, all his. If Sylvia married him.... She scarcely dared imagine the immense wealth and status that would follow.

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Summoning her thickest skin, she simpered at Yvonne. "Your Grace, if the two young people have taken a liking to each other, it must be fate! Surely you won't let my careless words ruin such a splendid match?" "Stop." Yvonne's eyes held only disgust. Her tone was biting. "My son, with his 'impoverished, wretched appearance, born of a 'low-born mistress, would surely be unworthy of your daughter." She was throwing Marwen's own venomous insults back in her face. Marwen's expression turned utterly sheepish. She stood awkwardly, not knowing where to put her hands or feet.

Yvonne turned decisively to Elowen, managing a polite smile. "Thank you for your kind invitation and hospitality today. Falconcrest Manor has pressing matters. I must take my leave." Elowen tried to detain her. "Why so rushed, my lady? Please, try the pastries. They are freshly made. The mulberry tarts, especially, were chilled with ice-sweet, fragrant, and perfectly cool for a day like this." Yvonne's tone was cool. "Your hospitality is gracious, and I appreciate it. But our affairs are indeed urgent." Seeing her resolve, Elowen could press no further.

She smiled gently, "Then I'll invite you again next time." Yvonne offered a final, perfunctory smile and turned to leave. Piers, concerned for Sylvia resting in the adjacent room, called out, "Mother..." Yvonne didn't even glance at him. "If you no longer wish to acknowledge me as your mother, then stay." With that, she strode away without looking back. Piers knew his mother was truly, deeply angered. 2/3 ::32 pm ppp. Chapter 102 Marwen's Regret Finished He sighed helplessly, watching her retreating back, then turned to Elowen. "Please tell Sylvia not to be afraid." Elowen nodded.

"I will." Piers gave her a look of profound gratitude before hurrying after his mother. Marwen, unwilling to give up, tried to follow, only to be shoved aside unceremoniously by a stern-faced senior maid from Falconcrest Manor. In the scuffle, she tripped over the pavilion's threshold and landed face-first in the dirt. She sat there, sprawled on the ground, watching Yvonne, Piers, and their entourage grow smaller and smaller in the distance. Rage and regret tore at her. Suddenly remembering something, she scrambled to her feet and turned to Elowen. "Your Grace!

Go to Falconcrest Manor at once and apologize! This is a perfect match! We cannot let it slip away!" Elowen's voice was cool. "I have done nothing wrong. Why should I apologize? Weren't you the one hurling insults at their heir?" Marwen's expression stiffened, then quickly shifted to blame. "This is your fault! You should have told me he was the Falconcrest heir!" Elowen refused the blame. "Did I not tell you he was not a merchant?" You didn't say he was the Falconcrest heir!" Elowen almost laughed at the absurdity. "Lady Marwen, I tried several times to speak.

You were the one who interrupted me each time, never allowing me a word in edgewise! You were the one who spewed vile insults in front of Duchess Yvonne herself, single-handedly

destroying any chance of this match! I warned you to mind your words, and you accused me of putting on airs!" 1.7K H 3/3 admin

Chapter 103 Missed Opportunities 0 Finished Regret and desperation churned within Marwen. She wished she could slap her own foolish face. After a moment of agonized silence, she turned pleading eyes to Elowen. "Your Grace, Sylvia is your cousin! You cannot simply abandon her marriage prospects!" Elowen's tone was indifferent. "And what if I do?" "If you do, I'll make sure everyone in Vanelle knows you have no heart!" Marwen resorted to threats even now.

Elowen actually smiled, "All your past efforts to spread ugly rumors about me relied on Duchess Yvonne, did they not?"

But now you have thoroughly angered the Duchess. On your own, how will you manage to spread those ugly words? Marwen's breath hitched. Her mouth opened and closed soundlessly.

Elowen sat calmly, sipped her water, and spoke softly, "Actually, if the match with Falconcrest is truly lost, Mr. Page is also a good choice." Marwen dismissed it instantly. "That Page family is nothing like your Hales! No high office, no title. I wouldn't consider it!" Elowen tilted her head. "Aunt, what are you saying? Mr. Page's mother is a lady of the blood-the daughter of a prince.

He passed the royal academic assessments with flying colors when he was still a young man, and he'll sit for the Imperial Scholarly Trials this year. His future is truly boundless." A lady of the blood? Marwen's eyes widened in disbelief. A prince's daughter? That meant Kaelan had a prince for a maternal grandfather? Even without an inherited title now, with such connections, a baronetcy or even a viscounty would be well within reach! Marwen's interest was instantly rekindled. At that moment, Elowen looked toward the entrance and smiled, "Mrs.

Wrenner, you've arrived." Rowena entered the pavilion, followed only by her maids. There was no sign of Kaclan. Elowen was puzzled. "Where is Mr. Page?" Rowena smiled. "On the way, he spotted a cat he found adorable. He's lingering there, playing with it. It will be a while before he can tear himself away." Elowen nodded in understanding. "I see." 173 2:32 pm Chapter 103 Missed Opportunities Finished Marwen seized the opening. "If you ask me, cats and dogs are filthy creatures, mere beasts. I don't understand the fascination. Our neighbors had a daughter who kept a black-and-white cat.

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She even let it sleep on her bed at night! If she were my daughter, I'd have given her a good scolding and thrown the creature out!" Neither Elowen nor Rowena responded. Marwen continued, undeterred, "Later, the cat went missing. The girl searched for days, only to find it dead in the street, stiff as a board. She cried pitifully. Tsk. I wonder if she'd cry that hard when her own parents die." Elowen frowned. "Aunt, if you have nothing worthwhile to say, perhaps say nothing at all. They are her parents. Whether she cries or not is none of your concern.

If you're so worried, you can go and weep for them yourself when the time comes." Marwen choked, flushing with embarrassment and anger. "I was only making conversation! Why so serious..." Elowen ignored her. Cora hurried in and bent to whisper in Elowen's ear. "Your Grace, Lady Sylvia is weeping terribly in the next room. I cannot console her. Would you go and see?" Elowen acknowledged with a soft sound and stood. She offered Rowena an apologetic smile. "Mrs. Wrenner, a small matter requires my attention. I shall return shortly." She gestured to the table. "Please, try the mulberry tarts.

They are chilled." "All right, go on," Rowena replied with good grace. After Elowen left, Rowena delicately picked up a small pastry. Marwen sidled closer, forcing a smile. "I hear your

nephew has grown into a most impressive young man." Rowena smiled politely but said nothing. Unable to contain herself, Marwen pressed on eagerly. "I heard you brought your nephew today to be introduced to my daughter Sylvia?" Rowena placed the tart in her mouth and chewed slowly, unhurried. Her silence was torture for Marwen, who fidgeted impatiently. Finally, Rowena swallowed.

Marwen leaned forward cagerly, expecting an answer at last. Instead, Rowena picked up her cup and took a sip. Marwen felt as if something were stuck in her throat, suffocating her. At long last, Rowena spoke, her voice gentle. "You are mistaken, Lady Marwen. My nephew often says a man should establish his career before taking a wife. Therefore, we are not here for an introduction today. We are merely guests. invited by Her Grace to enjoy pastries." 2/3 ( 2:32 pm P p p. Chapter 103 Missed Opportunities Marwen panicked. "What nonsense!

One always marries first, then builds a career!" Finished Rowena maintained her polite smile. "He should first distinguish himself in the Imperial Scholarly Trials. Only then is it suitable to seek a wife. Otherwise, he might be deemed of low standing, lacking high office or title-simply not worthy of consideration." Marwen's face draig words, spoken moments ago, had been overheard, every single one! It was over. Not only Falconcrest, but now the Pages as well... Why did I give birth to such a cursed daughter? Even getting her married is so damn hard!

Elsewhere in the Manor, in a small guest chamber next to the pavilion, Sylvia had been settled temporarily. 1.7K admin

Chapter 104 Thank You Finished On the way, Cora briefed Elowen. "The manor's physician saw to her face and applied a salve. But after Lord Piers left, Lady Sylvia wept so bitterly that the ointment was all cried away." Elowen sighed inwardly. Outside the guest chamber door, she

could already hear muffled sobs. Inside, Sylvia was slumped over a table, crying into her arms, her shoulders shaking violently. "Lady Sylvia." Elowen approached and sat on a stool opposite her. At her voice, Sylvia's crying hitched briefly. She didn't lift her head, still buried in her arms. "Forgive me, Your Grace..."

"I... I don't want to cry like this... I can't help it... I... I'll be fine in a moment..." Elowen asked gently, "Are you crying because Piers deceived you about being a merchant when he is actually the heir to Falconcrest? Or because your mother offended his mother, and you fear you and Piers have no future?" The question worked a small miracle. Sylvia lifted her head. The cheek struck by her mother was swollen and bore traces of salve, but her face was mostly a mess of tears. Her eyes, from prolonged weeping, were red and puffy like two walnuts.

Elowen felt a pang of sympathy, her brow furrowing slightly. "If it's the former, I personally see little harm. He and Cassian had their conflicts. Considering Cassian's presence, a small, harmless lie is understandable." Sylvia sniffled. "I... I'm not angry he lied. I'm angry at my mother..." Elowen understood. She was grieving, believing she could never marry Piers now. Elowen sighed, "Before he left, Piers asked me to tell you: 'Do not be afraid.'" Sylvia blinked. Those four simple words sent a wave of warmth and happiness through her bruised heart.

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"However," Elowen's tone shifted, "relying solely on Piers is not enough." "W-what?" Sylvia didn't understand. "Piers cares for you, and you for him," Elowen explained. "Even if your mother offended Duchess Yvonne, if Piers is determined to marry you, the match is not impossible. But-" She paused, her expression turning serious. "Your mother will not simply fade away." 2:32 pm PPP. Chapter 104 Thank You Sylvia looked bewildered. "What do you mean?"

Finished you. Elowen laid out a scenario. "If you marry into Falconcrest, and your mother insists on moving in with what will you do?

If her greed leads her to vie for control of the household? Or, if she doesn't move in, she will come to you for every want and whim. If you cannot provide, she will pressure you to beg Piers or go to him herself. After all, he would be her son-in-law. A fit of dramatics, and Piers, for your sake, would find it hard to refuse." Sylvia's face paled. After a long silence, she whispered hoarsely. "Then... I shouldn't marry him..." Fresh tears spilled. "I shouldn't ruin his life. He's been so kind to me. I can't..." "That is not what I mean!" Elowen felt a surge of frustration.

She reached out and grasped Sylvia's hand. "I am telling you that you must learn to be strong! You must learn to say no to your mother! You cannot always obey her, caving in the moment she raises her voice. Not just with her, but with anyone!" Sylvia stared, stunned. "If you can learn this." Elowen continued. "I will help you secure a place in Falconcrest Manor. If you cannot..." She pressed her lips together.

"Then resign yourself to marrying a man chosen by your mother's tastes, a man you do not love, or even become a concubine in some high-born household." "No!" Panic flashed in Sylvia's eyes. "I won't be a concubine..." Elowen said nothing, holding her gaze steadily. In Elowen's eyes, Sylvia saw a gentle yet formidable strength. It seemed to infect her. Gritting her teeth, Sylvia raised a hand and scrubbed the tears from her face. "I... I won't cry... I will become stronger! I promise!" Tears still shimmered in her eyes, but the helplessness had receded.

It was as if a dusty pearl had been cleaned and polished, beginning to shine once more. Elowen reached out, her thumb gently wiping a stray tear from Sylvia's cheek. "Dry your eyes. Reapply the salve yourself. A face as young and lovely as yours must not be scarred." Sylvia blushed

faintly. "Thank you..." Elowen froze. Back then, to save Alaric, she had been knocked down by a carriage, her knees badly scraped. In front of Alaric, she had pretended it was nothing. But at home, tears had welled as she admitted it hurt. Her aunt had made all sorts of treats to soothe her.

2/3 Chapter 104 Thank You Finished Her sister-in-law had sat by her bed, smiling as she applied ointment, saying, "You're too young to carry scars." Elowen had felt so cherished then, murmuring. "Thank you." As Elowen left the chamber now, a bittersweet ache settled in her chest, her eyes stinging. At the archway, she stopped. This time, the tears that fell were her own, and she could not hold them back. 1.7K 2:32 pm admin

Chapter 105 A Chance Encounter Suddenly, a hand appeared from her left, holding out a linen handkerchief. A clean, pleasant male voice followed. "Are you alright?" The voice was unfamiliar. Finished Mindful of propriety between men and women, she did not take the handkerchief, instead turning her face slightly away. "Please, don't be scared. I am Kaelan Page, invited by Her Grace to Duskmoor Manor today. I mean you no harm." he added, his tone earnest on the last words. Elowen was taken aback. Her tears had been few. She wiped them away with her sleeve, her face now clear.

She lifted her head to see if Kaelan looked as he did in his portrait. He still held out the handkerchief, his gaze lowered to meet hers. Her hair cascaded like a mass of glossy chestnut silk, and her skin glowed with the warm, creamy hue of well-tended ivory. She'd shed a few tears just now; though she'd brushed them away quickly, her eyes still swam with mist- soft and blurred, like pink roses veiled in a fine spring drizzle. A flicker of astonished admiration passed through his eyes, and for a moment, he couldn't look away. "You look even better than your portrait," Elowen spoke first.

Kaelan blinked. "You've seen my portrait?" Elowen smiled, "Did your aunt not tell you she was bringing you to Duskmoor Manor for an introduction?" Kaelan paused. His aunt had mentioned arranging a marriage for him. He had been somewhat resistant, having only recently passed the royal academic assessments and now assisting in the Royal Archives through his mother's connections, with his sights set on the Imperial Scholarly Trials this year. He worried about failing and had devoted all his energy to his studies.

But his aunt had been so earnest, he couldn't bear to disappoint her and had reluctantly agreed to come today. Now, as he looked at the woman before him, a warm, unexpected feeling stirred in his chest. Was she saying this because... she is the Lady Sylvia I was meant to meet? 173

Chapter 105 A Chance Encounter Finished If it were her, that would be... more than acceptable. He lowered his hand, the tips of his ears turning pink. "My aunt did mention it..." He glanced at her again. "May I ask your age?" Elowen saw no reason to hide it.

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"Seventeen." "And what do you enjoy doing in your leisure time?" Kaelan asked. Elowen found the question a bit odd, but answered truthfully. "Reading, writing, or sometimes baking pastries and sweets." Kaelan's ears grew distinctly warmer. This was precisely the kind of wife he had imagined. Feeling even more pleased, he asked, "Do you like cats?" Elowen nodded. "Quite a bit." She paused, then suddenly realized the misunderstanding. A soft laugh escaped her. "Mr. Page, my family name is Hale." Kaelan froze. She wasn't Lady Sylvia?

In Duskmoor Manor, named Hale, seventeen years old-there could only be one.... He seemed unwilling to believe it. "You are..." Elowen nodded. "Yes. I am the Duchess of Duskmoor." Despair washed over Kaelan. Only now did he belatedly notice the intricate styling of her hair-the manner worn by married women of Vanelle. He had been so captivated by her face that he

had missed it entirely. "Mr. Page, your aunt mentioned you were distracted by a kitten earlier, Elowen said, changing the subject. "Yes... there was an orange cat under the rockery, Kaelan replied slowly, his mind elsewhere.

"It was my first time here. After seeing the cat. I got a bit lost." "Shall I show you the way?" Kaelan looked at her, then nodded. "Thank you..." He hesitated over the form of address 225 ( 2:32 pm ppp. Chapter 105 A Chance Encounter Elowen offered a kind smile. "Your Grace will do." The words stuck in Kaelan's throat. It took him a moment to force them out. "Your Grace." The title felt like a small, private heartbreak. Why did she have to marry the Duke? Why did I meet her so late? He sighed inwardly.

Finished Elowen led him back towards the pavilion, unaware of the wheelchair that had come to a stop behind a nearby latticework screen overgrown with vines and flowers, which mostly concealed Cassian's form. In the sunlight, Cassian's brow was deeply furrowed, his gaze dark and intense. Elowen returned to the pavilion and spent a pleasant while longer chatting with Rowena. Despite the age difference, they found their temperaments aligned wonderfully. As the sky began to soften with the approaching evening, Rowena rose, reluctant to leave. She smiled at Elowen. "Next time it's on me.

Come visit my place." Elowen agreed happily. Pleased with how the day had unfolded, Elowen walked back to the main courtyard with a light step. She encountered Bran outside the study. "Is the Duke inside?" she asked brightly. "He is..." Bran confirmed, though Elowen missed the flicker of concern in his eyes. Inside, Cassian was at his desk, a book open before him. Elowen entered, immediately launching into an enthusiastic account of the day's events. When she

finished, Cassian merely responded with a noncommittal, "Hmm." Finally sensing something amiss, Elowen looked at him closely.

His face was expressionless. He seemed... displeased? 1.7K 513 admin

Chapter 106 The Longest Wait Elowen moved closer, her voice softening. "My lord, what's wrong?" Cassian didn't even lift his eyes from his book. "Nothing." "Are you hungry?" she tried again. "No." "Do you want to play chess tonight?" Her eyes shone with hope. He paused, then shook his head. "Not tonight." Elowen blinked, feeling a strange distance in his manner. "Your Grace, the carriage is ready," a servant announced from the doorway. Cassian glanced at the still-confused Elowen. "I have business.

I'm going to the palace." Elowen was taken aback, about to speak, but Cassian had already turned to the servant. "Let's go." After he left, the study fell into deep silence. Elowen stood alone for a long time, feeling puzzled and adrift. Had she done something wrong? Had she upset him? Unbidden, memories of Alaric surfaced-how cold he had been after their marriage. Was Cassian becoming like that now? He would likely ask for an annulment soon. She needed to prepare herself.

Finished Elsewhere in Vanelle- After Warren's capture by Nordia, Cassian had purchased a small house for Rowena and Elara to stay during their visits to Vanelle. Rowena and Kaelan had not yet returned home. Elara, having been confined to the house after her scene at Duskmoor Manor, had raged to no avail. Her mother remained unmoved. Now, sulking, she was curled under her bedcovers, crying with frustration "Miss. Miss." Someone was calling her. Elara, irritated, replied tearfully, "Go away!" 1/3 ( 2:32 pm Chapter 106 The Longest Wait Finished The person didn't leave.

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Instead, a voice, hushed and persuasive, continued, "I am here to help you, Miss. I know your heart belongs to the Duke, and that the Duchess stands in your way, preventing even a position as concubine." The words struck a deep chord. Elara finally peeked out from under the covers with swollen, red-rimmed eyes. She studied the unfamiliar maid by her bed. "I've never seen you before. Who are you?" The maid smiled, "Who I am doesn't matter, Miss. What matters is-" She leaned closer, her voice becoming a seductive whisper. "I have a way for you to get what you want. To marry into Duskmoor Manor.

Even... to replace the Duchess." Elowen ate lunch alone. She ate dinner alone. As dusk deepened, Mira entered the room. Elowen looked up from her desk. "Has the Duke returned?" "Not yet." Mira trimmed the candlewick beside the desk, brightening the light. "It's getting late, Your Grace. Shall I help you prepare for bed? Perhaps His Grace will not return tonight, or will be very late." Elowen shook her head. "I'll wait a little longer." Even if an annulment seemed likely, their marriage was still new, a union decreed by the King. They couldn't disregard royal face completely.

So, it wouldn't happen immediately. And Elowen still wanted to maintain some peace between them. Cassian had asked her several times to wait for him to come home. She had remembered. She was willing to do so. After Mira left, Elowen tried to focus on the household accounts, but her mind kept drifting back to Cassian's unexplained displeasure. Eventually, drowsiness crept in. The ledger lay open on the desk, but her eyelids grew heavy. Her right arm propped on the table, supporting her forehead, her head began to nod, dipping forward like a chick pecking at grain. A dream took hold.

She was five or six, held aloft in her father's strong arms, being playfully tossed into the air. She was laughing, ecstatic-then her father vanished. She was falling, headfirst, helpless. 23 2:32 pm ppp. Chapter 106 The Longest Wait Finished At the same moment, her supporting arm gave way, and her head lurched violently toward the hard surface of the desk. At the last possible instant, a broad, steady hand shot out and caught her, cushioning the fall. Elowen jolted awake. Her eyes opened slowly, meeting Cassian's dark gaze. The candle had burned low, casting a dim, soft light that blurred his features. Her mind was still foggy. "My lord..." "Hmm?" A faint, sleepy smile touched her lips. "You're back." Cassian's gaze lingered on her face. "You were waiting for me?" She nodded obediently. "I was waiting for you to come home." Waiting for you. To come home. The words sent a subtle but profound tremor through Cassian. They were like the softest of feathers, brushing repeatedly against a place deep within his chest. Her head still rested in his palm. She studied him for a moment, then gathered her courage and leaned in a fraction closer. Her voice was softer, gentler. "My lord, could you please not be angry with me anymore?" His brow furrowed almost imperceptibly. "I am not angry." "But you wouldn't look at me," she murmured, sounding genuinely hurt. "You just left without a single glance my way. The truth was, Elowen knew how to be charming. In her past, she had used this gentle, coaxing manner to wheedle treats from parents, brother, aunts, and sisters-in-law, or to soften their hearts when she was in trouble. 1.7K 313 admin

Chapter 107 Marrying You Is No Hardship At All The tactic worked on Cassian just as it had on others. Just one look at her, and his heart melted into a soft pool. He felt a sharp pang of regret for his earlier coldness. I was a fool. His voice lowered. "I wasn't ignoring you, nor refusing to look at you. I just..." He hesitated. I just felt too old, that you should have married a man your

own age. The words were right there, but they stuck in his throat. Elowen watched him unblinkingly. "Just what?" His throat worked. "I just thought...

marrying me might have been a hardship for you." "How could it be!" she refuted instantly.

"After my family fell in battle, and I was left alone, many people began to slight me, openly and in secret. If the King hadn't spoken of treating the Hale orphan kindly, I might not even have been able to remain in Vanelle..." Cassian's brow furrowed. He had been away at war for so long. He had heard of the Hales' losses and knew she must be grieving. He thought she liked Alaric, and with Alaric by her side, things wouldn't be that bad. He never expected this.

"Perhaps the Hale family's former glory was too bright, and they resented it. Our fall was the perfect opportunity. So they took it out on me." A trace of sadness entered her voice. But such things-given enough time-she could learn to live with. She sighed, then offered a small, soft smile, "Anyway, only the King and you have been truly kind to me. Marrying you is no hardship at all." She looked up at him, her expression utterly sincere, and added emphatically, "Truly!" "Alright." Cassian's gaze softened. His thumb brushed gently across her cheek. "Shall we go to bed?" Elowen looked troubled.

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"But I haven't washed up yet..." She pouted slightly. "But I'm so very tired. I've never stayed up this late. I don't want to go wash... Cassian conceded readily. "My fault." 1/3 2:32 pm ppp.

Chapter 107 Marrying You Is No Hardship At All Then he indulged her. "If you're tired, you needn't wash tonight." Her eyes lit up. "Really?" His voice held a smile. "Really." Elowen wavered, feeling a twinge of guilt. "But... is that alright?" Finished Her mother had taught her from childhood to be clean-to wash before bed, to rinse after meals.

Even when she was dropping with sleep, eyes closed, her mother would gently steer her to the basin. That teaching was bone-deep. Even after her mother's passing and after marrying into Duskmoor Manor, she had strictly followed the rule. Now for the first time, she wanted to be willful, but her conscience pricked her. Cassian said. "Just once. It's fine." His voice was low, pleasing, and utterly persuasive. Elowen was convinced. A satisfied smile spread across her face. "Then let's just go to sleep!" With that, she lifted her head and got up.

They merely removed their outer robes before settling into bed. Cassian, however, still had something on his mind. He lay on his back for a while before speaking slowly into the dimness. "Do you feel like I'm too old?" He received no answer. Turning his head, he saw that Elowen was already on her side, fast asleep. Cassian wasn't annoyed. A faint smile touched his lips. The resilience of youth. Asleep in an instant. His gaze drifted down, settling on her jawline, and his expression softened noticeably. There was a faint, reddish mark there, shaped vaguely like a palm.

Her skin was so delicate that it had retained the imprint from where it had rested in his hand earlier. He stared at it for a long time, then reached out to trace it with his fingers. Elowen, deep in sleep, felt the touch. Instead of pulling away, she instinctively nuzzled her cheek against his palm. Cassian froze, then felt an immense, melting sweetness spread through his chest. Elowen, using his hand as her pillow, drifted deeper into sleep.

273 Chapter 107 Marrying You Is No Hardship At All Fimmtud Cassian held that position, motionless, for the rest of the night, Elowen remained blissfully unaware. The next morning, as the first light of dawn filtered in, Elowen stirred in a half-awake haze. She felt something hard and uncomfortable pressing against her. She frowned, then realized what it was and jolted

awake. All drowsiness vanished. She slowly reached a hand under the covers, searching. "What is it?" A low, sleep-roughened voice sounded beside her ear. Her movement had woken him.

Elowen kept her head down.

"I forgot to take out my hairpins before bed..." Her fingers finally closed around the offending pin near the small of her back. When she clutched it, fragments of the previous night drifted back-asking Cassian why he was upset, complaining about being too tired to wash... The memories were hazy, incomplete. Feeling a bit embarrassed, she asked, "Before I fell asleep, did I say anything... odd?" 1.7K 1 313 admin

Chapter 108 More Hugs Might Help "Nothing odd." Cassian replied lazily, closing his eyes again. Finished He hadn't slept much, having watched her for a long time and kept his hand beneath her head most of the night. "Really?" Elowen was half-convinced. "Really." As he spoke, his hand settled lightly on her waist. "I'm not fully awake. Let me nap a bit," he murmured. The position was far too intimate. Elowen's cheeks flushed crimson.. Cassian was too close-the heat of his body seeped into hers, his even breath stirred her hair. She held her own breath, tense and still.

Just as she felt she might suffocate, a low chuckle sounded above her head. Elowen looked up. Cassian had opened his eyes again, looking at her with amused patience. "Do I frighten you so?" "No..." Her face remained flushed. "Then why so still? Why hold your breath?" he teased, raising a brow. Elowen bit her lip, answering truthfully, "I'm just... nervous..." "Nervous," Cassian repeated. "What shall we do about that?" Elowen didn't know. She had no experience in this. A thought seemed to occur to Cassian, his eyes crinkling with a deeper smile. "More hugs might help. You'd get used to it.

Best if you initiate it." Elowen blinked. "Is... that okay?" Cassian made a sound of affirmation, lying effortlessly. "That's what the King advised me last night" Elowen was taken aback again. "The King said that...?" Well, if the King said so, it must be true. Cassian's brow lifted slightly. "We have the chance now. Why not try? Initiate a proper embrace." Elowen was shy. Cassian coaxed her, gentle as if talking to a kid. "Stuff like this gets easy after the first time. Do it a few times and it'll feel natural." Elowen agreed with him.

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As husband and wife, she had to take that step sooner or later 1:3 2:32 pm PPP. p Chapter 108

More Hugs Might Help 0471 Finished Taking a deep breath, she summoned her courage and, with a scarlet face, reached out towards him. She hesitated briefly over where to place her hand, then settled it on his side. Cassian lay on his side, and his waist dipped into a clean curve, smooth and elegant. He hadn't drilled in a while, but his muscles were still firm, tough under her palm. Her face grew even hotter. Her hand slid slowly, tentatively, around to his back.

She moved with agonizing slowness, overwhelmed by embarrassment. Cassian, however, praised her. "Just like that. Very good." He prompted further, "Come closer. A little more." Elowen's face was now the color of a ripe berry, but she obeyed, shifting her body to lean into his embrace. Just as she was about to make contact, Gerda's voice sounded from outside the room. "Duchess Elowen? Are you awake?" Elowen froze, instinctively pulling back. But Cassian's hand remained on her waist, holding her effortlessly in place. He looked amused. "Why run? We're married.

A hug's perfectly legit, not some secret tryst." Elowen burned with embarrassment. Mrs. Wrenner has sent a message," Gerda added. Elowen's interest was immediately piqued. "From Mrs. Wrenner!" Cassian's eyebrow lifted. "You are on such good terms with her now?" Elowen

nodded with a smile. "We get along very well." She had specifically instructed Gerda and the others to inform her promptly of any messages from Rowena. Cassian's tone turned musing.

"And with her nephew? Do you get along with him as well?" Elowen tilted her head. "Do you mean Kaelan?" Cassian clicked his tongue.

Using his given name-so familiar already. Unaware of the note of jealousy, Elowen answered naturally, "I've scarcely spoken to him. I wouldn't know if we get along." Cassian's brow relaxed slightly. That answer was somewhat more acceptable. "I should see what message Mrs. Wrenner has sent," Elowen said, trying to sit up. 2/3 0441 Chapter 108 More Hugs Might Help But Cassian's hand on her waist held her gently in place. Finished She looked at him and softened her voice. "Let me go see what she wrote. You rest a while longer.

Next time, I'll hold you properly, and for longer." Cassian specified, "Tonight." Elowen agreed. "Alright. Tonight." Satisfied, Cassian lifted his hand. Freed, Elowen got out of bed to wash and dress. rosy, Gerda's Gerda had been waiting outside for a while. When Elowen emerged, her cheeks still experienced mind jumped to conclusions. A knowing, slightly mischievous smile appeared on her face. Elowen felt oddly embarrassed under her gaze. But Gerda, being a woman of the world, didn't ask questions. She promptly presented the note. Elowen read it, a smile forming.

"Ah, she's inviting me to view the water lilies." But as her eyes dropped to the date and location specified, her smile faltered slightly. August 12th. Falconcrest Manor. 1.7K 313 admin

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This date, this location-Elowen would never forget it. Falconcrest Manor boasted a grand water lily pond, planted with rare, expensive varieties. Finished The Duke and Duchess were famously

hospitable. When the lilies were in full bloom, they would send invitations across Vanelle, gathering the most notable nobles to admire them. In her past life, as Alaric's betrothed, she had accompanied him to Falconcrest Manor. But she had been accidentally pushed into the pond, swallowing mouthfuls of water, and nearly drowned. She knew how to swim, but her knees had been in too much pain.

As she struggled, she saw Alaric on the distant bank. He had watched, cold and unmoving. In that instant, a chill of utter despair had frozen her from within. It was Piers who had finally taken pity, diving in to rescue her. Soaked to the bone, hair and clothing in disarray, utterly humiliated, she had panicked as guests drawn by the commotion gathered to stare. It was Piers, again showing a shred of kindness, who had draped a cloak over her, sparing her at least some dignity. On the journey back, her heart had been full of hurt. But Alaric offered no comfort.

Instead, his face cold, he had demanded, "How is it that no one else fell in, only you? And to be rescued by another man-you have disgraced me utterly!" Elowen had felt her mind go blank then, her lips parting soundlessly. Her grief had been beyond words. What had she done wrong? She was the victim. If Piers hadn't saved her, she would have died in that pond. Was her so-called purity worth more than her life? That day, after his words, she had fallen into a silent, sorrowful stupor. The tears had come then, streaming down her face all the way back to Hale Manor, impossible to stop.

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Alaric hadn't offered a single word of comfort. When a small, choked sob had escaped her, he had only frowned out the window and made an impatient sound. Now, Elowen looked at Rowena's note, and her brow furrowed. 173 2:32 pm p pp Chapter 109 Falconcrest Manor's Invitation Her heart ached for her past self, and her distaste for Alaric grew sharper. Your Grace,

do you not want to go?" Gerda asked, observing her expression. "I'll go." A smile touched Elowen's lips. "Why wouldn't I?" She had formed a strong suspicion in her past life about who had pushed her.

She wondered now, with her life rewritten, if that person would try again. If they did, well, it would be the perfect opportunity to settle scores, old and new. Setting the note aside, Elowen took out a fresh sheet of parchment and picked up her quill. She was halfway through her reply when Bran entered, holding another, more formal invitation. "Your Grace, this has just arrived from Falconcrest Manor." Elowen wasn't surprised. She took it and scanned the contents. It was the same event Rowena had mentioned. Finished She found it slightly odd, though.

Protocol dictated that such widespread invitations be sent in order of rank and precedence. Duskmoor Manor should have received its invitation first, before others. Yet Rowena got the invitation earlier than Elowen. Was Yvonne displeased because of Marwen's behavior? Elowen couldn't be sure. After reading it, she told Bran, "You may return to your duties. I'll call for you when the reply is ready." "Yes, Your Grace." Once he left, Elowen stood and went into the inner chamber. She wanted to discuss the invitation with Cassian.

The wording suggested the Duke and Duchess hoped they would attend together, but whether Cassian wanted to go was his own decision. A few steps from the bed, she stopped, remembering the last time she had approached him unannounced. He had mistaken it for an attack, his reflexes nearly closing around her throat. This time, she was more cautious, stopping a short distance away. "My lord... she began. Before she could finish. Cassian's lazy voice came from within the bed curtains. "Come in " Elowen acknowledged and stepped forward, drawing back the curtain to sit on the edge of the bed.

2/3 2:32 pm ppp Chapter 109 Falconcrest Manor's Invitation Finished Cassian pushed himself up. "I almost hurt you last time. It won't happen again. I can tell the difference between you and an assassin." Elowen nodded. "Good. I understand." Elowen nodded. "All right. I get it." "What did Mrs. Wrenner write about?" Cassian asked. "Her nephew?" Elowen shook her head. "It had nothing to do with Kaelan." She gave him a slightly curious look. "You seem unusually focused on Kaelan. You mention him every time." Cassian paused. But Elowen quickly reasoned it out herself.

"Kaelan is the son of a lady of the blood-a prince's grandson. That prince would be one of your brothers. So, you are related, and rather closely." She didn't dwell on it, moving to the main point. "Falconcrest Manor is inviting the nobility of Vanelle to view their water lilies. They've sent an invitation for us both to attend." 。 1.7K 1 admin

Chapter 110 Could I Reprimand Him Too? Finished Cassian, however, frowned slightly. "So you received Mrs. Wrenner's note before the official invitation. from Falconcrest Manor?" "Yes." Elowen leaned in. "You find it odd too, don't you?" "Odd, yes. Neither the Duke nor the Duchess would dare show me such disrespect. But it's possible someone in between is playing games." Elowen tensed up a little. "So are we still going?" Cassian's gaze settled on her face. "Do you like water lilies?" Elowen hesitated. "...I don't care for them much.

But their seed pods are tasty, and lotus root can be cooked in many ways. Mostly, Mrs. Wrenner seems eager to go." Cassian gave a soft chuckle. "Then we'll go." "But..." "If anyone shows you the slightest disrespect, or if anyone attempts to bully you, you have my full authority to reprimand them as you see fit." Elowen blinked. "In Vanelle, Falconcrest is a high-ranking

house. But you are different. You are the Duchess of Duskmoor, the King's sister-in-law. To insult you is to insult the King and me. Punishing them is an extension of our authority.

Furthermore, the Queen will not be attending. Among the ladies present, you will hold the highest rank. No need to spare anyone's pride." Elowen asked suddenly, "Even... the Crown Prince? Could I reprimand him too?" Cassian looked at her for a moment, then nodded. "If you wish. Yes." Elowen said, a little embarrassed, "I'm worried I won't know when to stop."

Cassian's tone was lazy, but his expression was serious. "Should any trouble arise, send for me immediately. I will deal with the consequences. Even if it's murder, lay the blame at my feet.

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Elowen almost felt like bowing to him right then and there. This was a man among men, strength personified. She felt a growing pang of envy for the woman who truly held Cassian's heart. Who is she, to be so fortunate? ( Word of the Falconcrest lily-viewing event had reached Rose Hall later, along with the news that the invitation had been sent to Duskmoor Manor early. 173 2:32 pm Chapter 110 Could Reprimand Him Too? Finished An idea sparked in Marwen's mind. She sought out Sylvia, who was quietly embroidering, her face wreathed in an uncharacteristically pleasant smile.

"Sylvia, dear, have you paid your respects to Her Grace today?" Sylvia didn't look up. "Mother, just say it. Cousin-in-law told me I don't need to visit her every day." Cousin-in-law, my foot! As if she really sees you as family. Marwen seethed inwardly, but her smile remained fixed. "I merely heard she's attending the event at Falconcrest Manor. I came to ask what you plan to wear. If you don't have anything new, I'll pay for a fresh outfit." Sylvia's needle didn't pause. "Mother, I won't be going." Marwen didn't buy it. "How is that possible?" "Have you forgotten?

Your words that day were unforgivable. You offended the Duchess of Falconcrest. She won't want to see me. Why should I go and provoke her displeasure?" Marwen grew frantic. "That's in the past! She can't hold a grudge forever! Besides, you are to marry her son! She may be angry, but she won't disregard her precious boy!" Sylvia's voice was flat. "You insulted her son as well. He will resent me by association. He won't want to marry me anymore." Marwen froze, a wave of panic hitting her. "Stop embroidering this nonsense! Go to her!

Beg the Duchess to take you to Falconcrest Manor!" Her voice took on a wheedling, instructive tone. "When you see him, be sweet. Plead with him! If that fails, get him drunk! Once you're in his bed, once there's intimacy, he'll have no choice but to marry you! And if anyone asks, you say the Duchess of Duskmoor taught you!" Sylvia's brow furrowed. Marwen, losing patience, reached out to prod her daughter's head. "Are you even listening to me...?" To her surprise, Sylvia moved her head aside. Marwen's finger met empty air. She stared, stunned. Sylvia's frown deepened.

"Mother, I will never do such a thing. Do not ask me again." This was the first time her daughter had refused her so directly. Marwen gaped for a moment before fury erupted. "You ungrateful girl! Now that you've attached yourself to the Duchess, you think your old mother is useless!" Remembering Elowen's words, Sylvia bit her lip and summoned the courage she'd never known. "Drugging him, forcing myself into his bed, and then blaming the Duchess if discovered-is that what you call gratitude? That is not what Father taught me!" Your father?

What did he ever amount to!" Marwen spat, her old grievances surfacing. "A short-lived fool! Died early without even securing a title for his family!" 2:32 pm Chapter 110 Could I Reprimand Him Too? Fioraver Title, title... it's always about a title..." Sylvia murmured until she could bear

it no longer. "Father had no title. But did you suffer after marrying him? We weren't grandly wealthy, but we never wanted for food or clothing. Every bit of his salary, every reward he received, he gave to you. He kept nothing for himself..." 1.7K 1 admin