

Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess Novel

Chapter 271 Recklessness Cassian stared at her. : "Cecilia actually taught you that?" Elowen nodded honestly. Cassian sighed. He had clearly hired the wrong instructor. 39 Finished Fortunately his brother had once given him a copy of The Art of Intimacy, and when he flipped through it earlier he noticed several passages about how to please a woman. And for someone with a memory as sharp as his, that was more than enough. "All right," Elowen said, her tone softening as she caught Cassian's wrist and drew it down. Her voice turned sweet and coaxing. "Don't be upset. Let's go eat, all right?"

"I'm starving, and if I don't eat soon I might faint right at the table." Cassian, still distracted, gave a quiet, absentminded agreement. During dinner his thoughts never really returned to the meal in front of him. Elowen noticed, and for a moment she considered asking what had him so preoccupied. In the end she let it go, deciding that she was far too hungry and far too pleased to be eating to waste time chasing after his thoughts. Later that night, once they had washed and changed, they settled into bed.

Clothing loosened and slipped away, and before long Cassian began asking in a low voice now and then, checking and adjusting as he went, wondering whether here felt right, whether that way was better, whether she liked it like this. Only then did Elowen realize what had been occupying his mind all through dinner. By the time it dawned on her, it was far too late. She lay beneath him with her eyes slightly unfocused. Reluctantly, she had to admit something, Cassian truly had a natural gift for this.

He had clearly thought everything through ahead of time, and what he had planned worked exactly the way he expected. 1/4 14:41 Sat, Apr 11 .. Chapter 271 Recklessness 39 Finished The next morning, pale light filtered through the carved lattice of the window, spilling a soft brightness across the chamber. Cassian woke before he opened his eyes and reached out by habit toward the space beside him. Beneath the blankets his palm found warmth, soft and familiar, unmistakably alive. The quiet shape and heat of her settled something deep inside him.

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A faint smile touched his mouth without his noticing. He turned closer, leaned down, and pressed a kiss to Elowen's smooth cheek. Her breathing remained slow and even, still lost in sleep. Cassian lowered his head again and brushed a slow, deliberate kiss against the corner of her lips. That finally stirred her awake. Still groggy, she pushed lightly at his solid chest. "Heavy..." Cassian braced himself slightly, easing his weight off her without moving away. "So. Was it comfortable?" That question snapped the rest of her sleep right out of her. Her face went crimson.

"Yes." Cassian lifted a brow. "Just a little?" Elowen answered honestly, her voice small. "A long while." Cassian's low laugh rumbled out. "How long is a long while?" Elowen's voice grew even softer. "Just... a long, long time." Too embarrassed to endure it, she yanked the blanket up and covered her head, her muffled voice pleading from underneath. "Cassian, please stop asking. It's humiliating." Cassian's heart softened. He accepted it easily. "All right. I won't ask." His hand started moving lower anyway, his voice coaxing, "But...

something else?" Elowen went rigid, and still couldn't resist. The bedframe shook for a long time before it finally stilled. Afterward, Elowen lay limp, draped over Cassian's sweat-damp chest, staring blankly at the 2/4 14:41 Sat, Apr 11 ... Chapter 271 Recklessness blurred embroidery of

the canopy as if she'd forgotten how to think. Cassian brushed damp hair back from her cheek, his voice low and rough. "What are you thinking about?" Elowen came back to herself, heat rising again in her face. "I was thinking...

the sunset at Dawnfall Ridge is really beautiful." Cassian let out a lazy, questioning sound.

"You've seen it?" Elowen nodded lightly. A strand of her hair brushed against his skin, leaving a faint tickle behind. 39 Finished "That day I went with aunt and Yvonne to Dawnfall Ridge," she said. "We stumbled on it by accident." She looked up at him. "Do you at him. "Do you want to go with me?" Cassian studied her flushed face. His fingers traced her skin lightly. "We'll go. But this afternoon." Elowen blinked. "Why?" Cassian smiled. "We woke up late, and we just spent quite a while in bed.

If we get up now, we'll be right on time for lunch." He continued, steady and practical. "After that I have to get treatment from Hugh. When that's done, we'll leave. We'll arrive in the late afternoon, close to evening." Elowen nodded, a beat behind. Cassian added, "And it works out. We can stay one night at Serenity Church. In the morning we'll watch the sunrise, and we can light a candle." Elowen's curiosity flared. "For what?" Cassian touched her cheek. "For a child." Warmth rushed through Elowen's chest. A child with Cassian-what is that like? The thought made her heart tremble.

They stayed in bed a little longer, then called for attendants and got up. After lunch, Elowen curled back onto the window couch and returned to her book. 3/4 14:42 Sat, Apr 11 Chapter 271 Recklessness Cassian sat in his wheelchair and had Bran push him to Hugh for treatment. 39 Finished Hugh had arrived early and waited for hours. His handsome face looked drained and irritated, with faint shadows under his eyes. 1.8K W 14:42 Sat, Apr 11 ... admin

Chapter 272 Tired 39 Finished The moment Cassian came in, Hugh threw the words at him.

"Your Grace, even if you're newly married and inseparable, you should show a little self-control." Cassian stayed calm, shot him a glance, and said, "Don't say that in front of my wife. She's shy. You'll embarrass her." Hugh stared. Cassian continued lazily, "If you're jealous, I can introduce you to someone too." Hugh's expression darkened further. "Get out." He kept his face set and gestured sharply for Cassian to hold out his arm. Hugh's fingers found Cassian's pulse. He focused, reading it.

Then he froze. Hugh frowned, checked Cassian's pulse again as though he could hardly trust what he was feeling, and then slowly shook his head. "Something wrong?" "No mistake. If anything, it's better than it should be." Cassian raised a brow. "Better than it should be?" Hugh released his wrist and studied Cassian from head to toe, clearly puzzled. "What exactly did you do last night and this morning? Your pulse says your circulation is smoother, your strength has recovered much faster, far more than yesterday.

No ordinary treatment could have improved your condition this much." Cassian went still for a moment. He hadn't done anything-except Elowen. After a brief pause, Cassian looked at Hugh. "Hugh. Is there something you know that I don't?" Hugh was still thinking about the pulse and answered without really thinking. "What?" Cassian lowered his gaze toward his legs, his voice quiet. "Seems my wife may be the cure after 1/4 14:42 Sat, Apr 11 Chapter 272 Tired all." 39 Finished At the Baker estate, dusk slowly settled, and the courtyard sank into shadow.

After Geoffrey finished his work, he headed toward Clarisse's courtyard as he usually did. A maid stopped him outside with a cold expression. "Miss isn't feeling well. She has already retired for the night. She won't be seeing anyone today." Her tone was stiff and unfriendly. Geoffrey

understood immediately. Clarisse was punishing him. That morning, he had let his gaze linger on the Duchess of Duskmoor a few times too many. After leaving the Crown Prince's Wing, he had even probed cautiously, asking whether they should return to Sunspire Hill. Clarisse had crushed the idea on the spot.

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So he had returned to his own room alone. But the restless hunger in his body refused to fade. He had tried to handle it himself, yet no matter what he did, the frustration only grew worse instead of easing. And every time he closed his eyes, Elowen's face appeared before him. That pale, flawless profile had burned itself deep into his memory. He had heard that Cassian had little interest in his wife, and had even stood by while others humiliated her on the day of Alaric's wedding. And Cassian lived confined to a wheelchair. For all anyone knew, she might as well have been living alone.

That morning she had turned her head and looked at him once. Her eyes had been clear and gentle, almost disarmingly soft. She must have felt it too. The idea ignited something reckless inside him. B Women-especially young and beautiful ones-if they lived without a man's affection for too long, how could they possibly endure that loneliness? The more he thought about it, the harder it became to restrain himself. Finally Geoffrey snapped. 2/4 14:42 Sat, Apr 11

Chapter 272 Tired 39 Finished He grabbed a coat, strode outside, pulled a horse from the stable, and rode hard toward Sunspire Hill. By the time the sky had fully darkened, he arrived. At the gate, the guards stopped him suspiciously. "Who are you? What business do here?" Geoffrey had done things like this before. He stayed calm and even offered an easy smile. you have "I'm with the Baker family. My name's Geoffrey. I came here earlier today with my lady." He continued smoothly. "My lady spoke privately with the Duchess.

She left first, but later realized something meant for the Duchess was never delivered. She sent me back with it." The guard frowned. "What is it?" Geoffrey reached into his coat as if to take it out, but paused halfway and looked at the guard instead. "My lady instructed that it must be handed directly to the Duchess. No one else is meant to see it." He smiled casually. "You're welcome to ask her whether she'd like to let you take a look." The guard's expression shifted slightly. He hesitated. But Geoffrey appeared far too composed, and nothing about him seemed suspicious.

Finally the guard waved him through. "Fine. Go." Geoffrey's smile widened, "Much appreciated." He walked inside without any trouble. He remembered the layout well. It didn't take long before he reached the main courtyard. Just then a maid stepped out. 3/4 14:42 Sat, Apr 11 Chapter 272 Tired 39 Finished Geoffrey stopped her and asked casually with a friendly smile, "Do you know where the Duke is?" He needed to make sure Cassian wasn't here. Otherwise things would be difficult. The maid glanced at him and answered without suspicion. "He's not here." Geoffrey quietly breathed out in relief.

"He went to Dawnfall Ridge," she added while walking away. "He won't be back anytime soon." Satisfaction flared through Geoffrey's chest. If Cassian wasn't returning soon, and only Elowen remained here... Then nothing stood between him and her. A woman left alone for too long would inevitably grow lonely. 1.8K 。 W admin

Chapter 273 The Wolf In The Chamber And Elowen looked young, the sort who would be easy to pressure. 39 Finished Earlier Anwen had merely played the victim, and Elowen had immediately shown sympathy and rushed off to plead with Cassian. She was soft-hearted, the sort who believed whatever she was told. Geoffrey could already imagine how it would go. A

few sweet words, a small display of strength, and she would resist just enough to make it feel convincing before eventually giving in. He had done this many times before. Those sheltered girls always flushed the moment they saw his body.

Once he guided their hands across his arms, they usually melted within moments. Elowen was a woman too. It would be no different. And the thought of having Elowen left his mouth dry. The candlelight inside the room was dim and hazy. He saw a slender figure standing in the middle of the room with her back toward him, her head slightly lowered as if studying the folding screen. Geoffrey stared at that narrow waist and swallowed. He could not wait another moment.

"Duchess." Sylvia had come to say farewell.

Elsbeth and Yvonne had decided they would return to Vanelle first, so they had sent Sylvia over to deliver the message. When Sylvia arrived, she learned that Elowen was not here. A maid explained that the Duke and Duchess had gone to Dawnfall Ridge on a sudden whim without informing anyone and would return early the next day. Sylvia nodded. She had intended to leave immediately. 1/4 14:42 Sat, Apr 11 ... Chapter 273 The Wolf In The Chamber 39 Finished But the furnishings in the room were unusual, especially the tall four-panel tapestry standing to the left.

The backing cloth was pale ivory silk, and the embroidery depicted a misty river valley worked in layered shades of blue and silver. The craftsmanship was extraordinary. The distant hills were rendered with soft, flowing stitches that gave them the hazy look of land half-hidden in morning fog, while the nearer stone pavilions and arched bridges were stitched with tight, precise threads that defined every edge and roofline. The river itself was the most striking detail.

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Fine strands of silver, pearl white, and pale blue thread had been woven together so skillfully that in the candlelight the surface seemed to shimmer like real water shifting beneath a cloudy sky.

The rain was worked with even finer stitching, thousands of delicate threads falling across the scene so densely that it looked as though an entire curtain of misty rain had been captured inside the cloth. Sylvia enjoyed it. At a glance she could tell this was far from ordinary work.

She was completely absorbed when someone suddenly called out, "Duchess." Sylvia turned and saw a tall, powerfully built man striding toward her. His face was unfamiliar and rough. She immediately stepped back twice to create distance, her brows drawing together. "You've mistaken me for someone else. I'm not the Duchess. She isn't here." Geoffrey stopped. Only then did he realize she wasn't Elowen. Still... She was pretty, Not as breathtaking as Elowen, but attractive enough. And when a man was hungry enough, he didn't need a feast to be satisfied. Geoffrey's smile spread wider. "My apologies.

I didn't realize I was standing before such a beauty," He clasped his hands politely. "And what may I call you?" Sylvia's expression remained guarded. 2/4 14:42 Sat, Apr 11 Chapter 273 The Wolf In The Chamber 39 Finished "My surname is Ashcroft. If you don't need anything, I'll be leaving now. Goodbye." She stepped around him and walked toward the door. Geoffrey moved quickly. With one step he blocked her path. "Miss Ashcroft. Surely you don't mind a moment alone with me?" He smiled as if it were perfectly harmless. "I'm not a dangerous man." Sylvia's brows tightened further.

"I am engaged to Piers of Falconcrest Manor. The match was granted by His Majesty himself." Her voice sharpened. "Whoever you are, step aside. If word spreads that we were alone in a room together, it would ruin my reputation, and it would not end well for you either." ruin For most

men, mentioning Falconcrest Manor and a royal betrothal would have been enough. Geoffrey was not most men. The moment he heard she was engaged, his eyes lit up. To him, women who were promised- or already married-were even more enticing. More thrilling. Instead of retreating, he stepped closer. He didn't back away.

Instead, he moved a step closer, his gaze sliding down over her as his voice turned smooth and insinuating. "I know Piers. The man's rigid, always carrying himself like the world is a formal ceremony." Geoffrey leaned closer as though sharing a private confidence. "If you want a man like him to stay interested, to truly lose his head over you, there are certain things you need to learn, though I imagine you'd be far too shy to ask anyone about them." His smile spread wider.

"Fortunately for you, I happen to be someone who could show you." a Sylvia had spent her entire life under careful protection, first under her father's watch and later within the sheltered walls of Duskmoor Manor. She had never encountered anything remotely like this. The sheer disgust of the moment left her mind momentarily numb. She did not argue. She turned immediately and headed for the door, drawing breath to call out, 3/4 14:42 Sat, Apr 11 J Chapter 273 The Wolf in The Chamber "Someone-" : Geoffrey's hand clamped firmly over her mouth.

Sylvia struggled with everything she had, kicking and striking at him with her fists. (39) Finished Against a man like Geoffrey, broad-shouldered and hardened by training, her resistance had little effect beyond providing him with a moment's amusement. 1.8K M admin

Chapter 274 Help 39 Finished He lifted her with unsettling ease, his voice lowering to a murmur.

"Easy now, Miss Ashcroft. If you're already worn out this quickly, how do you suppose you'll manage later?" The tone he used was almost gentle. "Relax," he continued softly. "Once you understand how good it can be, you'll enjoy it." He forced her down onto the couch. Her back

struck the cushions hard enough to send a sharp jolt of pain through her spine. His hand remained tightly over her mouth, pressing hard enough to restrict her breathing and make any cry impossible.

Tears flooded Sylvia's eyes as panic surged through her. Inside her mind she cried out desperately. Father, please save me. Elowen... please. Piers-Piers, save me. Yet no one came. The tears finally spilled over, and in that moment Sylvia understood with crushing clarity that no one was coming to rescue her. In the dim light of the room, Piers's face rose in her thoughts. Before leaving earlier, she had seen him once. He had slipped away to the northern side of the city to buy the frozen dessert she had been longing for. When he handed it to her, it was still chilled.

She tasted it, and it was better than any she had ever tried before. a Piers had sat beside her and spoken gently. "The engagement was arranged by His Majesty. Even if my mother dislikes the idea, she cannot openly oppose his will. I have thought about it seriously." His voice had been steady. "My mother may never warm to you, but in the end it is our lives that matter. I will sit for the royal examinations.

If I earn distinction and take office the way she 1/4 14:42 Sat, Apr 11 Chapter 274 Help hopes, she may come to believe that marrying you was the right choice after all." 39 Finished Sylvia had looked at him with concern. "But you never wanted a life in office. I don't want you forcing yourself into something you hate because of me." Piers had only smiled. "It wouldn't be only for you," he said lightly. "I have never tried it before, so I assumed it would be dull. Yet so many people compete for it that perhaps it is more interesting than I thought. Who knows?

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It might even suit me." Sylvia had been about to speak again, but Piers reached over and brushed a small smear of dessert from the corner of her mouth with his thumb. "Don't worry," he told her softly. His gaze had been warm and reassuring. "For all we know, I might not even pass. If that happens, we will simply remain at Falconcrest Manor. And if my mother truly cannot stand you and you find yourself unhappy, we will move elsewhere. Is there somewhere you would rather live?" Sylvia's heart had stirred at those words. "Rivenshire," she had answered quietly. Her cheeks flushed slightly.

"When I was young, I traveled there with my father. The bridges and the willow trees... the place felt almost like paradise." Piers had nodded without hesitation. "Then Rivenshire it is." Now the memory of his voice and face slowly faded, dissolving from her mind. And in that desperate moment, Sylvia found strength she had not known she possessed. She opened her mouth and bit down hard on Geoffrey's hand. She put every ounce of strength she had into the bite, as though determined to crush bone. Geoffrey hissed in pain and jerked his hand back just enough for his grip to loosen.

Sylvia seized the opportunity instantly, She tore the hairpin from her head and pointed it straight at him. Her hair tumbled loose around her shoulders, but it did nothing to hide her eyes, wet with 2/4 14:42 Sat, Apr 11 Chapter 274 Help tears, red with fury, and blazing with hatred. Her voice trembled and came out rough. "Stay away from me." Geoffrey shook his injured hand twice before lifting his gaze back to Sylvia, a grin slowly spreading across his face. ⌘ 39) Finished To Geoffrey, she looked less like a frightened lady and more like a small creature baring its claws in defiance.

What had seemed like an unremarkable face at first glance now carried a fierce, vivid intensity, and that sudden spark only made her more compelling in his eyes. The urge to dominate her surged sharply through him. He watched her with a slow, leering smile as he spoke. "Easy now, pretty thing. That pin belongs in your hair, not in your hand. Start waving it around like that and you might hurt yourself, and that would be a real shame." Sylvia's fingers tightened around the hairpin until her knuckles turned pale. Instead of retreating, she stepped toward him, her voice cutting and resolute.

"I suggest you leave while you still can. I am Piers's betrothed, and our match was granted by His Majesty himself." Her breathing was uneven, yet the words continued without hesitation.

"My father was General Aldric, who gave his life on the battlefield for this realm. His Majesty is my cousin, and Cassian is as well. My aunt is Selene and the Marchioness of Havenstead." A fierce light burned in her eyes as she held his gaze.

"I will never betray the man I am to marry, and I will never bring disgrace upon my family." Without giving Geoffrey any chance to respond, she stepped forward once more with sudden resolve and drove the hairpin straight into his chest. For a brief moment Geoffrey remained perfectly still. He stared at Sylvia, and then his gaze slowly dropped toward his chest. It took several seconds before he truly understood what had happened. When the realization struck, pain followed instantly, twisting his face as he clutched the wound.

3/4 : 39 14:42 Sat, Apr 11 Chapter 274 Help "You-" The curse never finished leaving his mouth. The strike had landed with brutal precision, dangerously close to something vital. Finished The strength drained from his body almost immediately, and he collapsed onto the floor as harsh, ragged breaths tore from his throat. Only then did Sylvia allow herself the faintest release of

breath. A moment later, hurried footsteps erupted outside the room, the sound chaotic and fast.

"Inside. Bring him out." The voice was unmistakably familiar.

Sylvia's face drained of all color as tears gathered along her lashes. Slowly she turned her head.

Yvonne stood there. A Despair crashed over Sylvia so suddenly it felt as though the ground had given way beneath her feet. In that instant she understood with terrible clarity that everything had already fallen apart, and nothing she said now would be able to change what came next. Damn.

1.8K ◦ admin

Chapter 275 Yvonne Changes Her Mind 39 Finished Yvonne had never liked Sylvia in the first place. She'd resisted this marriage from the start. Now that she'd seen this with her own eyes, she was bound to hate Sylvia even more, to think she was the kind of woman who couldn't keep herself straight, that she was "ruined." At Yvonne's order, footmen stormed in with clubs in their hands, looking ready to beat someone senseless. Sylvia shut her eyes in despair. They're about to tie me up and haul me off to drown me. In this life, she and Piers were never going to happen.

"Sylvia!" Yvonne's voice cut in again. Sylvia opened her eyes slowly. Yvonne had come up close. She reached out a hand, her voice unexpectedly gentle. "You must be terrified." Sylvia just stared, stunned. The Duchess... she doesn't hate me? Yvonne took Sylvia's hand and spoke softly.

"This is my fault. I got here too late. Come on. We're leaving." Before she led Sylvia out,

Yvonne cast one last look at the man being pinned on the floor. That face, she had it right. He was the house steward's son from the Baker household.

Back at Dawnfall Ridge, he'd been the one who'd climbed into the carriage with Clarisse and hooked up with her. Yvonne had no idea how he'd ended up at Sunspire Hill, but he'd somehow latched onto Sylvia here too. Today, it had been Yvonne who told Sylvia to come and say

goodbye to Elowen. Which meant Sylvia had ended up in this danger because of her. Guilt twisted tight in Yvonne's chest. 1/4 14:42 Sat, Apr 11 . Chapter 275 Yvonne Changes Her Mind 39 Finished Luckily, after she'd sent Sylvia off, she'd thought it over again.

Having Sylvia come alone to say goodbye could look disrespectful to the Duchess of Duskmoor. So Yvonne had decided to come too. , Outside the door, she'd heard what Sylvia said. That she wouldn't betray Piers. That she wouldn't shame the Ashcroft family. It hit Yvonne hard. And in the same instant, she understood that Sylvia was in danger inside that room. She'd rushed in, and there it was, Sylvia driving a hairpin into the man's chest.

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Yvonne had always regarded Sylvia as an utterly unremarkable girl, timid by nature, skilled at little more than quiet needlework, and far too plain to be considered a worthy match for her precious son. But in that moment, Yvonne saw it clearly. This girl had courage. And she had a backbone. It was almost ridiculous, how had Yvonne ever liked Clarisse? Sylvia is clearly the better choice. A daughter-in-law like that would make the whole household prosper. Yvonne made up her mind on the spot. Marry. This marriage has to happen. And it has to happen fast.

If someone else snatched her up, Yvonne would regret it for the rest of her life. Elowen had barely eaten half a bowl of noodles at Serenity Church when a servant came running in with news: something had happened at the hot springs estate at Sunspire Hill. "A man tricked the guard outside. He said he had urgent business with the duchess, and he got into your courtyard. Miss Ashcroft was there at the time. He tried to, he tried to force himself on her," Elowen froze. The noodles in her bowl didn't look appetizing anymore, "Is she okay? Sylvia's okay, right?" "She's okay, Just shaken up.

Miss Ashcroft pulled a pin from her hair and stabbed him in the chest. The doctor says she hit the spot. If it'd gone in any deeper, he would've died right there." Only then did Elowen breathe again. 2/4 14:42 Sat, Apr 11 Chapter 275 Yvonne Changes Her Mind Okay was all that mattered. Cassian spoke up. "Where'd he come from?" : 29 Finished The servant answered, "He said he was from the Baker household. We were going to grab him and question him, but he was hurt. When I left, he was still unconscious." Elowen turned her head sharply.

"The Baker household?" "Yes." Elowen remembered that man's look when he'd been around her before, sticky and unsettling, like something that wouldn't wash off. Even now, it made her stomach turn. She looked at Cassian. "I think it's the steward's son. He came to my courtyard before, following Lady Anwen and Clarisse." Cassian nodded. Elowen wouldn't accuse someone for nothing. If she said it, it was real. Most likely he'd been coveting her, waiting for an opening to get what he wanted. Cassian's gaze darkened. Something cold and sharp flickered behind his eyes.

Elowen set her bowl aside and stood. "Let's clean up and head back." Cassian lifted his eyes. "Aren't we watching the sunrise tomorrow?" Elowen was serious. "But something that big happened at the estate. We're the hosts, for one. And as her brother and sister-in-law, we need to check on her. Sunrises happen every day." Cassian gave a quiet sound of agreement. They packed quickly and headed back to Sunspire Hill. On the way, it finally sank in, and Elowen murmured, "Sylvia's amazing. Not only did she protect herself, she managed to hurt him." Cassian replied evenly, "I told you before.

Sylvia's capable." Elowen still sighed. "I just don't know what Yvonne's going to think after seeing it." If that made Yvonne look down on Sylvia, what then? That was how the world

worked too often. An innocent woman got targeted, and somehow people blamed her for it, said she wasn't careful enough. Worse, they demanded she die to 3/4 : 14:42 Sat, Apr 11 Chapter 275

Yvonne Changes Her Mind "prove" her purity. Elowen's chest stayed tight the whole way back.

1.8K 39 admin

Chapter 276 A Marriage Talk 39 Finished If Sylvia had been humiliated today, and Yvonne was the kind of woman who obsessed over purity, then even if nothing truly happened, the unease would still wedge itself into her heart. Elowen returned to Sunspire Hill with that worry gnawing at her. Cassian went to handle the attacker, questions, interrogation, whatever needed doing. He took it on himself. Elowen went straight to Sylvia. Sylvia had been staying in the small courtyard next to Elowen's, but when Elowen went over, Sylvia wasn't there.

A maid said, "Miss Ashcroft is with the duchess Yvonne." Elowen stepped inside and immediately saw Yvonne, full of concern, holding Sylvia's hand and asking, "How are you doing? Are your hands still shaking?" Elowen paused, backed out, then stepped back in again. Yvonne patted the back of Sylvia's hand gently. "Sweet girl. You've really been through it." Sylvia looked overwhelmed by the kindness, cheeks red as she shook her head. "I'm much better now. Thank you, duchess." Yvonne's eyes were soft with affection. "You sweet thing. Why are you still calling me 'duchess'?" Elowen was speechless.

That is a fast turn. "You feel better now?" Cassian's voice came from nearby. Elowen's eyes curved as she nodded. "Elowen!" Sylvia noticed her then and called out, "Why did you come back?" Elowen said, "I heard a man snuck into the estate. I wanted to see for myself." Yvonne was so pleased with Sylvia that she seemed to like Elowen more too. She smiled. "You didn't

need to rush back over one bold man. We could've handled it ourselves." 1/3 14:42 Sat, Apr 11 G
Chapter 276 A Marriage Talk Then she added, "But it's good you're here.

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I was about to take my leave and head back to Vanelle." 39 Finished Elowen made the polite offer. "Why not stay a few more days? It's rare to get a hot springs trip." Yvonne smiled. "The hot springs are great, but I've got too much waiting. The biggest thing is, once I'm back in Vanelle, it's time to handle those two kids' marriage. Dragging it out isn't doing anyone any favors." Sylvia blinked. Elowen's smile widened. "I see." Then Elowen said, "But it's late. Stay one more night. Tomorrow morning, I'll have someone escort you back." Yvonne agreed, still smiling.

After a few more words, Elowen excused herself and left the courtyard. Outside, she ran into Elspeth. Elspeth went straight to it. "Ella, do you know what happened with Sylvia?" Elowen nodded, smiling. "I heard everything." Elspeth looked thoughtful. "This is one of those awful things that turns into a blessing. Sylvia's marriage is finally settled." "Yeah," Elowen said. "And after today, we can relax. Even if she runs into other situations, she can handle herself." Elspeth's eyes went a little red, and she let out a quiet sigh.

"If Aldric can see this where he is, he can finally rest." ସଞ୍ଚାର Elowen gave a small sound of agreement, then looked at Elspeth. "Next Elspeth looked back. up is your situation." "Lydia, and Nina too. Cassian and I will figure out a way to deal with them for you," Elowen said. Elspeth didn't take it seriously, "You're young. And you're sweet. How do you think you're going to deal with that mother and daughter?" She waved it off and patted Elowen's hand. "Focus on your own marriage. Have a baby soon." At the word baby, Elowen's cheeks flushed.

2/3 14:42 Sat, Chapter 276 A Marriage Talk Finished Elspeth smiled. "I'm going to check on Sylvia. You go rest." Elowen agreed. When she got back, Cassian had already been waiting in the courtyard for a while. Elowen went up to him. "Done questioning him already?" Cassian nodded. "Big guy, but he folds fast. Hit him a couple times and he spilled everything." Elowen blinked. "Can I go see him?" Cassian took her hand. "Don't. It's messy." He wasn't about to tell her that he'd had them smash the man's "weapon" to pulp.

On the first strike, Geoffrey had started shaking all over, sobbing and begging. And when he was done confessing, Cassian had them finish the job. Elowen stayed where she was and asked, "So what are you doing with him?" Cassian's tone stayed flat. "He's a Baker servant. The Baker household will answer for it. I sent Bran to handle it." Elowen nodded. Cassian's thumb brushed lightly over her wrist. "Let's go to Serenity Church." Elowen tilted her head. "It's really late. And we just got back." Cassian looked at her.

"I want to watch it with you." Then, quieter, "If we miss this one, who knows how long it'll be before we get another chance." Elowen frowned, confused. "Why? Serenity Church isn't that far. We can go whenever." Cassian said, "Something came up in Vanelle. We need to get back soon."

1.8K # 3/3 14:42 Sat, Apr 11 admin

Chapter 277 Church Elowen froze. Vanelle? Something happened? She looked at Cassian. She couldn't bring herself to refuse him. "Okay. Let's go." Cassian looked pleased. He kissed the back of her hand. "Good." 39) Finished So they climbed back into the carriage in the night and headed for Serenity Church again. Elowen was exhausted. The carriage rocked, and she fell asleep hard. Even when they arrived, she didn't wake. Cassian touched his knee. It didn't hurt

much. He glanced toward the horizon. A few thin streaks of light had already started to break through the clouds. Sunrise was close.

He left the chair behind, lifted Elowen onto his back, and carried her step by step toward the viewing platform. Elowen woke to the feeling of being draped over a broad, steady back. Her cheek pressed against cool fabric, and beneath it was warmth, heat and the firm lines of a body she knew. The scent was his: clean, grounded. She opened her eyes, still hazy. It was still dark. Everything sat in that deep blue just before dawn. The mountains and trees were only shapes. A faint scatter of light, maybe lingering stars, maybe the first edge of morning, outlined part of Cassian's profile.

She shifted her numb body and whispered, hoarse with sleep, "Cassian." His voice was lower than usual, but calm. "You awake?" "Yeah." Her mind cleared. "Put me down. Your leg isn't healed. You can't do this." She tried to get down, but the arm hooked under her legs held firm. He even adjusted her higher, like he was making sure she was comfortable. 1/3 14:42 Sat, Apr 11 Chapter 277 Church "I'm fine," Cassian said. "Not tired." Then, just as simply, "I want to carry you." Finished Something inside Elowen tightened, like she'd been tapped in the center of her chest.

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Heat rose, spreading without permission. She could feel her ears warming. A cool dawn breeze swept through, tugging loose strands of her hair. Elowen didn't argue again. She let her cheek settle back against him. For a while neither of them spoke. Only Cassian's steady footsteps sounded against stone steps and the path. Before long, they reached the platform. They had watched the sunset here the evening before, and the low table and chairs the attendants had set

out were still in place. Cassian walked to the cushioned bench and bent slightly, careful as he set Elowen down. Elowen sat steady.

She smoothed the wrinkles in her skirt and tucked windblown strands of hair behind her ear.

Then she looked up at Cassian, who was straightening his sleeve, and asked, "Am I heavy?"

Cassian shook his head. "You're light." After a beat, with a trace of amusement in his voice, he added, "I could carry two of you." Elowen murmured, "Two of me would be a lot. You wouldn't make it." Cassian sat beside her and gave a quiet laugh. "You forgot? I was a general. When I was healthy, I charged into battle wearing armor that weighed dozens of pounds, carrying a weapon heavier than that.

"You don't weigh much." Elowen blinked, suddenly wanting to see him like that, silver armor, white cloak, on a battlefield, the kind of man enemies feared. Then her thoughts slid somewhere they shouldn't. If she'd met Cassian first, would she ever have liked Alaric? But that was only a question that could never change anything. The past was already the past, a faint heaviness rose in her chest, and her eyes lowered. 2/3 14:43 Sat, Apr 11 Chapter 277 Church Warmth touched her cheek. Cassian's fingers, his thumb lightly pinching her cheek. "What is it?" Elowen snapped back.

"What?" Cassian watched her closely. "You don't look happy." "I'm fine," Elowen said automatically. 39 Finished Usually, no matter who she was with, even Cassian, she hid what she really thought. She stayed quiet. She dodged. But in that hush before sunrise, it felt like the whole world was holding still. Like she could hear their breathing. She suddenly wanted to say something real to him, just a little. She pressed her lips together and stared at the floral pattern on her skirt. "I was just thinking... if I hadn't married you, my life would've gotten really bad.

Really bad." Cassian looked down at her. "Why do you think that?" She didn't lift her head. "My family... is gone. I don't have anyone behind me anymore. And I'm not someone people naturally like. And I'm not that smart, either." 1.8K (1) 14:43 Sat, Apr 11 admin

Chapter 278 The One Who Protected Her Cassian lifted a brow. "Back to doubting yourself?" Elowen muttered, embarrassed, "I mean it." Cassian's gaze stayed steady. "Ella, you're good. People do like you. And you are smart." 39 Finished His thumb brushed her cheek again. "And even if Hale family is gone, you still have me. If you were in trouble, I'd pull you out. I like you. I want you happy. That has nothing to do with whether you married me." Elowen went still and looked In her last life, Cassian had been badly hurt and unconscious for years.

By the time he woke, she'd already been married into the Crown Prince's Wing, worn down, exhausted, hollowed out. Elowen had always thought that, in that life, Cassian only helped her deliberately left her behind at Duskmoor Manor. once, But now, little details she'd ignored started to line up. when Daphne After Cassian woke, he'd kept a low profile, rarely appearing, his health never fully back. And yet, people from Duskmoor Manor had often shown up at the Crown Prince's Wing. Back then, Elowen hadn't thought much of it.

She'd assumed it was formal politeness between branches of the royal family. But every time Duskmoor Manor's people came and spoke with Alaric, they always "happened" to look in on her afterward. Now she understood. That was Cassian, watching out for her. Later, when she'd finally gathered the courage to ask Alaric for a separation, Alaric had exploded. He'd grabbed a cup and struck her, splitting her forehead. That same day, someone from Duskmoor Manor had arrived again, another "routine" visit. That man had seen the fresh wound at her hairline.

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He'd said nothing, kept his face blank, but his eyes had lingered. Not long after that, the stubborn Alaric had finally agreed. Elowen had told herself it was Daphne whispering in his ear. Or her own persistence. Or Alaric simply getting sick of her. Only now did she realize it had been Cassian. In a place she couldn't see, he'd been protecting her all along, in his way. The realization spread through her chest like sudden warmth after a long winter chill. Something inside her softened until her chest felt tight with it. Elowen didn't speak for a long moment.

She simply leaned her head against Cassian's shoulder. At first it was tentative, just a touch, then she felt how solid he was, and she let herself settle fully. Half her cheek, the side of her forehead, resting there like it belonged. Cassian paused, then shifted slightly, subtle and quiet, so she'd be more comfortable. The first light broke across the horizon and morning slowly unfolded. The mountains brightened gradually, ridge after ridge coming into view as the shadows pulled back and the sky shifted toward gold.

Elowen stayed against Cassian's shoulder, looking out, feeling a calm she hadn't felt in a long time. They weren't wrong. Dawnfall Ridge sunrises and sunsets really were beautiful. Elowen pressed her cheek a little closer to him. "Ella," Cassian said, his voice low. She made a small sound and looked up at him. Cassian didn't answer with words. He lifted both hands, held her face, and kissed her. Elowen accepted it. She lifted her arms and wrapped them around his neck. Under the brightening sunrise, they kissed.

When Cassian finally pulled back, his forehead still resting against hers, he said, "We should back." Elowen remembered. "You said Vanelle had trouble?" "Yes." Cassian's fingers lingered at the back of her neck, rubbing that soft patch of skin. "You probably know this already, Her Majesty's third brother abused his position in the army and stole military pay. I had him locked

up. My plan was to stay with you at Sunspire Hill a few go 2/3 14:43 Sat, Apr 11 ... Chapter 278

The One Who Protected Her : more days, then go back. But last night, he was released." 39

Finished Elowen stared.

"Someone can release a man you put in prison? Whoever did that must carry serious authority."

Cassian gave a short laugh. "And you said you weren't smart?" Then he told her plainly, "It was Alaric." Elowen frowned. " "He's doing it to challenge me in the open," Cassian said. "Isn't that going to be hard to deal with?" Elowen asked, worry showing. Cassian didn't look bothered. He smiled lazily. "It's nothing I can't handle. He's only the crown prince." Then Cassian touched her cheek.

"Come on." Elowen asked without thinking, "Where?" "We'll light a candle, offer a prayer for children, share a simple meatless meal, and then head down the mountain and return," Cassian said. He held his hand out. Elowen placed her hand in his and let him pull her up. Quietly, she asked, "Do you really like kids?" Cassian led her along. "Not other people's kids. Like Alaric, I don't like him. I used to mess with him plenty when he was younger. But if it's our kid, I'll love them." 1.8K admin

Chapter 279 Waiting At The City Gate Elowen's eyes curved again. "Do you want a boy or a girl?" 39 Finished "Doesn't matter," Cassian said, glancing at her. "If they're ours, I'll love them. What about you?" Elowen's cheeks warmed. "People always talk about having both. I think... one son and one daughter would be perfect." "Okay." Cassian smiled and squeezed her hand. "Then we'll keep trying until we get both." At the same time, the Crown Prince's Wing, Isla sat upright in a carved sandalwood chair, her face cool. "What are you thinking?"

Your third uncle has never been particularly close to either of us. Back then, to get ahead under Cassian, he didn't hesitate to break ties with me to advance himself." That was why, at first, Isla hadn't planned to help at all. At minimum, she'd wanted him to suffer enough to learn something. Alaric kept his eyes lowered, his tone gentle. "Mother, I haven't forgotten the past. But family is family. The Baker family stands as one house. My third uncle may be foolish, but we cannot simply turn our backs on him." Isla narrowed her eyes. "Is this really about saving the Baker name?

Or is it because you want to go head-to-head with Cassian?" Alaric paused, then recovered immediately. "You're overthinking it. I'm already married. How could I still be that impulsive?" Isla studied him for a long time. When she didn't see anything obvious, she exhaled slowly. "You'd better not be." She stood. "This won't stay hidden. Cassian has probably already heard. He'll be coming back from Sunspire Hill. When he does, this will end up in front of your father. Have you decided how you'll handle it?" Alaric bowed. "Please don't worry.

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I'm prepared." Seeing his confidence, Isla didn't press further. She changed topics. "And your wife." At the mention of that woman, disgust flashed across Alaric's face. 1/3 14:43 Sat, Apr 11 G Chapter 279 Waiting At The City Gate To him, the only crown princess had ever been Elowen. As for Daphne, what was she? 39 Finished "You stood in front of your father and became husband and wife," Isla said. "Even if you can't stand her, you still have to keep up appearances. Yesterday your father asked me when you two planned to have a child." A child? Daphne deserved to carry his child?

Alaric forced the disgust down. "I know what I'm doing." Isla looked at him hard. "Don't disappoint me." Then she left, taking a maid's hand as she went. Once she was gone, the room

fell quiet again. Alaric's smile vanished, his face turning cold. He sat at his desk and called Tristan in. "What about what I told you to investigate, Cassian?" Tristan bowed. "Your Highness, when His Grace was in Vanelle, he covered his tracks. A lot was deliberately wiped clean. It's been difficult. But this time, when he left for Sunspire Hill, some things came to the surface.

Before he left the Vanelle, he went in plain clothes to a secluded residence north of the city almost every other day. Each time he stayed about half an hour, sometimes longer." "A residence?" Alaric frowned. "Yes. Security there is unusually tight. All His Grace's trusted people. Ours can't get close. We can't see what's happening inside." Alaric tapped a finger lightly on the smooth desktop. Then he stopped, a sharp light in his eyes. "Cassian...

is he keeping a woman out there?" In his last life, Alaric had heard Cassian had someone in his heart, and that he'd refused to marry for years because of her. So maybe this time, with the marriage granted, Cassian had taken Elowen because he couldn't refuse, just like Alaric had, and was keeping his real woman hidden on the side. To Alaric, that was excellent news. 2/3 14:43 Sat, Apr 11 ... Chapter 279 Waiting At The City Gate He knew Elowen. She looked gentle, but underneath she was stubborn. If she found out Cassian had betrayed her, she'd likely demand a separation.

That was exactly what she'd done to Alaric in the last life. 39 Finished And if Elowen left Duskmoor Manor, where would she go? Only back to the Crown Prince's Wing. "Find out when Cassian is returning to Vanelle," Alaric ordered, a sure smile curling at his mouth. "I'll meet him at the city gate myself." Tristan bowed and withdrew. Alaric went to see Daphne again. Outside the courtyard gate, Daphne's maid, Iris was standing watch, craning her neck anxiously toward the path. The moment she spotted Alaric approaching, she hurried forward and bowed deeply.

"Your Highness." Alaric did not even glance at her and continued walking straight toward the door. "Your Highness!" Iris let out a startled cry and hurried forward, forcing herself to step into his path. Alaric's expression darkened with irritation. "What is it?" Cold sweat prickled along Iris's back, but she steadied herself and spoke carefully. "Please allow me to inform the Crown Princess first, Your Highness. In case Her Highness is not properly dressed at the moment, I would not wish her to cause offense." 1.8K 1 admin

Chapter 280 Wrong When he reached her, he caught her chin in his hand and forced her to look up at him. Finished "Daphne," he said quietly, every word deliberate, his tone stripped of warmth. "Everything that has happened to you is the result of your own choices. None of it has anything to do with Elowen." Daphne bit her lip harder, tears sliding down. "But it's because I love you so much. Your Highness..." Alaric's expression turned mocking, but his tone shifted slightly. "Is that so? Then I'll give you one more chance." Daphne stared at him through tears.

"Really?" Alaric made a noncommittal sound. "In two days, Cassian and Elowen return to the Vanelle. You'll come with me to meet them at the gate. There's something you need to do." Including packing time, Cassian and Elowen set their departure for the Vanelle for the morning two days later. That morning, the weather was fine, but Elowen slept late. Cassian was already up. He didn't rush her. He simply had the kitchen keep a pot of oatmeal warm and waited for her to wake on her own. Meanwhile, at Vanelle's city gate, Alaric got word that Duskmoor Manor's carriage was returning.

Early that morning, he brought Daphne and went to wait. They waited from morning until the sun climbed higher, until the light turned harsh. Even with autumn underway, the sun still burned hot. Alaric had rushed out without preparing food. After nearly two hours, his stomach growled

loudly. He forced down half a flask of water just to feel steadier. Still, sealed in expensive robes, sweat beaded across his forehead.

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He'd groomed himself carefully, since he'd be seeing Elowen today, but now he only looked rumpled and miserable. Just as his patience ran thin, a carriage finally appeared at the far end of the road: Duskmoor Manor. Alaric inhaled, pushed down the irritation, and smoothed his expression. With Daphne and his attendants, he walked forward to greet them. 2/3 14:43 Sat, Apr 11 ... Chapter 280 Wrong The carriage stopped at the gate. 39 Finished Alaric stepped forward and bowed.

"Uncle, Aunt, welcome back to the Vanelle." The carriage door opened halfway from inside, revealing Cassian's face, handsome and cool. Cassian looked down at Alaric. "What?" From where Alaric stood, he could see only Cassian. Elowen wasn't visible, not even a corner of her sleeve. A strange disappointment flashed through him. He hadn't seen her in a long time. He kept his tone respectful. "I've prepared a welcome meal, to celebrate your return. I hope you'll honor me and come." Cassian didn't answer right away. as if asking someone's opinion.

stead he turned slightly toward the inside of the carriage, Inside, Elowen lounged against a soft cushion, idly playing with the tassel by the window. Sensing Cassian's glance, she looked up, met his eyes, and nodded once. Cassian turned back. "Fine." Then he shut the door. Alaric's brows pinched. Cassian acted like Alaric wasn't worth acknowledging. But thinking of what would happen later, Alaric didn't bother getting angry. He said smoothly, "Then I'll go ahead and have everything arranged." 1.8K a 14:43 Sat, Apr 11 ... admin