

Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess Novel

Chapter 281 Meal Without waiting for a reply, he mounted up and left to prepare. ૨૩ 39)

Finished Duskmoor Manor's carriage followed at an unhurried pace, arriving at the restaurant

after. Cassian got down still seated in his wheelchair. Elowen stepped down, draped a thin

blanket over Cassian's knees, moved behind him, and took the handles, pushing him forward.

Alaric stood on the steps and watched it all, his mood souring. Elowen had only ever been that

attentive to him. So why was she treating Cassian this way now?

He ground his teeth, then turned and warned Daphne in a low voice, "Do what you're supposed

to do in there. If you mess it up, you know what happens." Then he walked away. Daphne's face

was pale. She curled her fingers tight. The entire restaurant had been booked under the Crown

Prince's Wing. Guards were posted inside and out. No outsiders. The private room was on the

first floor. A server led the way. Elowen followed, pushing Cassian's chair. Halfway there, they

ran into Daphne. Elowen stopped short when she saw her. Daphne looked like she'd withered.

Even with makeup on, her complexion didn't improve, if anything, it made her look like she'd

pasted a false face over exhaustion. "Greetings, Duchess," Daphne said, eyes lowered, and

bowed. Elowen nodded in return. Daphne pressed her lips together and asked softly, "Could I

speak to you alone for a moment?" Elowen lifted a brow. "Sure." 1/3 14:43 Sat, Apr 11 Chapter

281 Meal 39 Finished Bran immediately understood. He stepped up, took hold of the wheelchair,

and continued on with Cassian toward the private room. Elowen stayed. "What do you want to

say?" Daphne didn't speak right away.

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She kept watching Cassian's direction until he was far enough that he couldn't hear them. Only then did she exhale and step one pace closer, lowering her voice. "I just wanted to give you a friendly warning. Cassian has a woman outside." As she spoke, Daphne watched Elowen's face carefully. But Elowen only listened, calm. Daphne's heart tightened with impatience. This was Alaric's assignment. On the wedding day, she'd been exposed for pretending to be Azure. She'd lost face and earned the displeasure of both Alaric and Isla. Since the marriage, Alaric had never stayed in her bed.

They still hadn't consummated the marriage. Daphne blamed all of it on Elowen. She wanted Elowen dead. So that was her plan. She had made the doll and tried to lay a curse on Elowen in secret. She hadn't expected Alaric to catch her. With that leverage, he'd forced her to come to the gate and tell Elowen, face to face, that Cassian was keeping a woman. Truthfully, when Daphne first heard it, she'd felt a vicious kind of delight. So Elowen wasn't as happy as she looked. The man who seemed to dote on her was keeping someone else on the side.

Elowen had once sworn to Daphne that the woman in Cassian's heart was Elowen herself. Now that seemed laughable. Elowen actually believes a man when he says he loves her? On the way here, Daphne had imagined Elowen's reaction. Shock, eyes wide, unable to speak. 2/3 14:43 Sat, Apr 11 .. Chapter 281 Meal 39 Finished Or heartbreak, trying to hold back tears but failing. Either way, Daphne would've enjoyed it. Instead, Elowen was too calm, and Daphne found herself getting annoyed. So Daphne continued, adding details. "It's in Elmwood Alley, at the very back. The gate's painted red.

The back courtyard has expensive chrysanthemums planted everywhere. Cassian set the woman up there, then goes every few days. I heard... I heard she has a great figure, plays instruments,

dances. He's crazy about her, buys her anything she wants." "Chrysanthemums?" Elowen turned her head sharply. She remembered Cassian had been going out frequently for a period of time. When he came back, there was often a clean, faint chrysanthemum scent on him. So he'd been going there... Daphne nodded. "Yes." Elowen made a small sound, still not looking shocked or sad.

"Why are you telling me this?" This time, Daphne froze. Elowen's gaze moved over her once. "You don't like me. You hate me. If Cassian really had someone outside, you'd be thrilled. You'd watch and make it worse. You wouldn't warn me. So why are you warning me?" Daphne's stomach dropped. Elowen was right. Under normal circumstances, Daphne would've watched the disaster unfold and enjoyed every second. 1.8K 1 admin

Chapter 282 Other Woman Finished She clenched her fingers in her sleeve, voice tightening. "I... I don't like you, but..." She forced her eyes red, dropping her voice. "I'm not doing well in the Crown Prince's Wing. On my wedding day I was exposed. I lost everything. Alaric doesn't like me. Her Majesty treats me coldly. I..." She seemed to choke on tears, then looked up at Elowen. "I know I was stupid. I did a lot of wrong things. I was jealous of you. But after I married in, it's been worse than I can stand. Only now do I understand, you really treated me like a friend.

You really were good to me. And I want to do something for you. Ella, please. We're both women. Forgive what I did." Elowen's expression stayed cool. "You want to make it up to me?" Daphne nodded hard, dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief, still wearing that familiar helpless look. Elowen tugged one corner of her mouth. "That's not enough." Her voice was too low. Daphne didn't catch it. "What did you say?" Elowen smiled faintly. "Nothing." Daphne tried

again. "So..." "I heard you," Elowen said evenly. "I understand." She didn't say she believed it. She didn't say she didn't.

Daphne's nerves stretched tight. She wanted to push more. But Elowen cut her off first. "I'm going in. I'm hungry." And without waiting for Daphne to respond, Elowen walked toward the private room. Behind her, Daphne stared at her back and bit down in anger. As Elowen neared the door, she could hear Cassian and Alaric talking, about the Laurent matter. A servant outside bowed at once. "Duchess." Inside, the voices stopped. The servant opened the door. Elowen went in. 1/3 14:43 Sat, Apr 11 ... Chapter 282 Other Woman 39 Finished Alaric stood immediately.

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"Aunt." His eyes stuck to Elowen, almost hungry. Cassian, seated at the head, frowned. Alaric hesitated, then continued. "Please sit. Today's dishes are all the latest popular things in Vanelle. Aunt, you'll like them." Cassian spoke coolly. "So you only care whether she likes them, not whether I do?" Alaric blinked, then forced a smile. "You and Aunt are one. If she likes them, I'm sure you will too." Cassian didn't answer. He gestured to the empty seat beside him, indicating Elowen should sit there. Elowen walked past the seat Alaric had in mind and sat directly beside Cassian.

Alaric's posture stiffened for a fraction, then he managed a smile. "Fine. I'll have them bring the food." Elowen glanced at him. "Not waiting for the crown princess?" Alaric said carelessly, "No. She doesn't matter." Right after he spoke, the servant outside announced, "Crown Princess." Elowen looked up and met Daphne's deathly pale face in the doorway. She'd heard Alaric's words. She bit her lip in humiliation and stepped inside, keeping her head down. At the table, the mood turned strange, Alaric gestured toward the platter of fish on the table.

"Aunt, if I remember correctly this has always been your favorite. I had the kitchen prepare it especially for you. You should try some." And he put it into Elowen's bowl. Elowen wasn't ready for it and didn't dodge in time. She turned her head. 2/3 14:44 Sat, Apr 11 U Chapter 282 Other Woman Cassian's face held no expression at all. His eyes were dark, cold. Cassian didn't react yet. 39 Finished When Alaric reached to serve her a second time, Cassian finally snapped. He set his fork down with a sharp sound. Alaric's hand froze midair. "Uncle?" Cassian's face stayed blank. "We're done.

We're leaving." He was speaking to Elowen. Alaric frowned slightly. He rarely got to see Elowen and didn't want her to go. "We just started. A lot of dishes aren't even here yet. Stay a little longer." As he spoke, he reached toward the platter as though intending to serve some onto Elowen's plate again. This time, Elowen moved her bowl aside. The fish fell onto the table. Cassian spoke slowly, each word heavy. "I said we're leaving." There was no room to argue. Alaric couldn't afford to show his hand yet, so he simply agreed and rose to escort Cassian and Elowen to the door.

He watched Duskmoor Manor's carriage roll away. The smile on his face disappeared completely. Back in the private room, Alaric's eyes went straight to Elowen's bowl. The fish he'd tried to give her had been pushed aside. She hadn't eaten a bite, Alaric frowned as he looked at Daphne. "Did you pass along everything I asked you to?" Daphne nodded. "I told her everything." 19 1.8K B 3/3 admin

Chapter 283 Reaction Finished Alaric took the chair Elowen had been sitting in. Slowly, he picked up the fork from her place setting and asked, "How did she take it?" Daphne hesitated. "She... barely reacted." Alaric's frown deepened. He turned sharply to Daphne. "What do you

mean she barely reacted?" Daphne's heart pounded. She had the uneasy sense that if she answered poorly, Alaric would turn his anger on her. "She... she..." "Your Highness," Iris said softly from behind. Alaric glanced at her. ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ Iris kept her eyes lowered.

"Even if she was displeased, she would never show it in front of the crown princess. But I'm certain it left a crack. What woman would calmly accept her husband keeping another mistress elsewhere?" Alaric didn't speak. He rubbed Elowen's fork between his fingers, as though he might still find a trace of warmth there. "If Your Highness wants proof she took it to heart," Iris continued, "it's simple. Have someone keep watch on that residence north of the city, and keep watch on the duchess as well. See whether she goes there. Then find out whether Cassian and the duchess quarrel.

That will give you your answer." Alaric studied Iris for a long moment. "You're a clever girl." Iris lowered her head even further. "You flatter me. I've only picked up a little by staying close to the crown princess." Alaric snorted, "Learned from her? She's a fool." Daphne had been humiliated so openly that even her own maid now seemed to outrank her. Her face twisted with shame, yet she did not dare show the slightest reaction. Alaric turned back. "Fine. We'll do it your way." Then, using Elowen's fork, he finished the remaining piece of fish one bite at a time.

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In Duskmoor Manor's carriage, the wheels rolled steadily over the road. 1/3 14:44 Sat, Apr 11
Chapter 283 Reaction : Finished Elowen lounged against the cushion, one hand resting lightly over her flat belly. "Alaric really hasn't changed. He chooses a restaurant, orders a table full of dishes so everything looks impressive, yet hardly any of it actually tastes good. The abalone was overcooked, far too tough. The bird's nest soup wasn't even prepared properly.

Our cook could throw together a simple plate of greens and it would still taste better than that meal." Cassian's expression, which had been cold earlier, softened slightly. "When we get home, I'll have the kitchen prepare whatever you like." Elowen looked at him. "Were you angry when you saw him trying to serve food?" Cassian didn't deny it. "Yes." Elowen smiled, reached for Cassian's long fingers, and squeezed them twice. "Don't be upset. I didn't eat any of it." Cassian gave a low sound and closed his hand around hers.

For a while, the only sound inside the carriage was the steady rhythm of the wheels against the road. After a moment, Cassian asked, "Daphne wanted to speak with you alone. What did she say?" Elowen's eyes curved as she deliberately stretched out the words. "Nothing much. She said you've hidden a woman away in Elmwood Alley." Cassian raised a brow as his gaze met hers. The carriage rolled into Duskmoor Manor. Before it had even fully stopped, several men in official court robes had already gathered around it. Voices rose one after another. "Your Grace, did you hear?"

His Highness released Laurent!" "Laurent embezzled military funds, an enormous sum. His Highness brushed it aside using the excuse of royal privilege. So blood alone now places someone above the law?" "This is outrageous!" Cassian pushed open the carriage door, The men noticed Elowen seated beside him and immediately fell silent before bowing. "Duchess." Elowen looked over their attire. These were high-ranking officials. 213 14:44 Sat, Apr 11 Chapter 283 Reaction 39 Finished This was clearly state business, and she had no place involving herself in it.

She stepped down from the carriage and inclined her head politely. "Cassian, I'll return inside first." Cassian nodded. "All right." Elowen turned and left. Back in her courtyard, she went into the study and carefully recorded the expenses from their stay at Sunspire Hill, item by item.

Cassian and the officials continued debating in the fallen and the discussion still hadn't Study for so long that night had already ended. omeone send Elowen couldn't wait any longer. She had word to Cassian, then washed and went to bed. Half-asleep, she felt the mattress dip someone sat down.

sly as A familiar clean scent leaned close, foll by warm lips brushing the corner of her mouth.

Elowen didn't open her eyes. Her voice was lazy and rough With sleep. "You finished?"

Cassian's voice was low and pleasant beside her ear. "Just now." "How did it go?" "Not well.

Alaric's more cunning than I expected. He released Laurent and arranged for someone else to take the blame. With the evidence we have now, we can't prove Laurent's guilt." admin

Chapter 284 Mess Elowen finally opened her eyes. "That sounds like a mess to sort out." 39

Finished Cassian smiled and kissed her again. "It's nothing too serious, only complicated.

Matters like this are never simple. Even if he hadn't released him, it wouldn't have been resolved quickly." Elowen nodded faintly. The exhaustion from earlier still weighed heavily on her. She

shifted into a more comfortable position. "Sleep." Cassian touched her cheek and asked softly,

"Just sleep?" Elowen's voice blurred with drowsiness. "Too tired. Just sleep." "Alright." Cassian

said nothing more.

He wrapped an arm around her from behind and fell asleep with her. The next morning, when

Elowen woke, the space beside her was empty. Mira came in to help. Elowen yawned and asked,

"Where's Cassian?" Mira gathered the bed curtains. "He left early this morning. He didn't say

where he was going." Elowen paused, then motioned Mira closer and whispered in her ear, "Go

to the north side of the city for me.

I need you to look into something..." At the Crown Prince's Wing, Alaric returned from the morning council still dressed in his formal court attire, a richly embroidered doublet belted at the waist, his posture straight and composed. The moment he stepped through the doorway, he saw Tristan waiting beneath the covered walkway. Tristan stepped forward at once. Alaric cast him a brief glance. Something important. Without slowing, he walked straight into the inner study. Tristan followed and closed the door behind them. He bowed and lowered his voice.

"Your Highness, there's been movement." Alaric lifted his chin slightly. "Go on." 1/3 14:44 Sat, Apr 11 J Chapter 284 Mess 39 Finished "This morning His Grace left the manor as usual and headed north of the city," Tristan reported steadily. "About half an hour later, Mira slipped out through the side gate of Duskmoor Manor and went toward Elmwood Alley as well. Our people saw her at the entrance of the alley. She lingered there for quite some time before leaving." Alaric's lips curled faintly. Mira had served Elowen for years. Elowen trusted her completely.

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If Mira had seen it with her own eyes, Elowen would believe it. Which meant Elowen would believe Cassian truly kept another woman elsewhere. Alaric's mood improved immediately. But even that was not enough. He wanted Elowen to be utterly disappointed in Cassian before she finally turned to him with her whole heart. Alaric considered it briefly before asking, "What month is it now?" Tristan blinked once but answered immediately. "Your Highness, it's November." "November..." Alaric repeated thoughtfully, tracing his finger lightly across the surface of the desk. Then he looked up.

"Falconcrest Manor's heir, Piers. His wedding should be soon, shouldn't it?" At Duskmoor Manor, Elowen finished breakfast and, with nothing urgent demanding her attention, settled down to read. After sitting on the daybed for a while, she began to feel cold. Vanelle had grown

colder recently. Only a few days earlier she had been at Sunspire Hill, surrounded by the warmth of the hot springs. Returning to the city so suddenly, her body had not yet adjusted.

She didn't feel like getting up herself, so she called out, "Mira, bring me a blanket." Mira answered and went to the wardrobe to find a fur throw. "Duchess, Miss Ashcroft has arrived," Cora announced softly from outside. Elowen turned toward the sound. "Let her in." 2/3 14:44 Sat, Apr 11 Chapter 284 Mess The curtain rustled as Sylvia entered. 39 Finished She wore a new outfit. Her face looked fresh, pink and pale. The anxious tension that once lingered in her expression had disappeared, replaced by a bright and lively look. She bowed properly.

"Sylvia greets you." Elowen sat up, smiling as she looked Sylvia over. Sylvia finally looks like the young noblewoman she's meant to be. Elowen set her book aside and reached out to help her up. "Get up. We're family. You don't need to stand on ceremony." But when Elowen's fingers touched Sylvia's wrist, she felt something smooth and solid. She looked down. Sylvia wore a matching pair of bangles, clear and richly colored, clearly expensive. Elowen let out a small sound. "New bracelets?" Sylvia's cheeks flushed slightly as she lowered her eyes.

"This morning Duchess Yvonne invited me to her residence. When I left, she placed these on my wrist herself..." Elowen understood immediately. She patted Sylvia's hand with a smile. "She must be of you. She's already treating you like her future daughter-in-law." Sylvia looked "I owe it all to you... to what you've taught me." Elowen tilted her head slightly. "Why thank me? I haven't taught you anything." They had not even known each other for very long. "I mean it," Sylvia said firmly. "If it hadn't been for would have dared to drive that pin into his chest." very fond u that day...

I would have panicked. I never Elowen's expression softened. "No, Sylvia. That courage wasn't something I gave you. It was always there. You carry the Ashcroft blood. Your father died fighting for the realm, and he was a brave man. Elspeth rides and shoots with fierce skill, and well. That strength runs in your blood, and it has nothing lene stands strong in the palace as do with me." 1.8K (admin

Chapter 285 Wedding Prep And A Trap 39 Finished Sylvia listened, her feelings tangled up so tight they made her eyes sting. She nodded hard. Elowen pulled her over and had her sit beside her on the daybed. Cora appeared at just the right moment with fresh juice. Elowen suddenly remembered something. "Wait. Your wedding date, the one written right into the Royal Decree. It's December first, right?" Sylvia cradled the cup in both hands and nodded. "Yes. That's what the decree says." "Then it's almost here." Elowen counted on her fingers. "If we're being generous, we've than a month.

I need to move fast. When you leave this house, you're doing it in style." got less Then her expression pinched with worry. "I've never run a wedding before. I barely know what I'm doing half the time." "Ella, what are you scared of?" The voice came from outside the door, bright, laughing, and confident. Elspeth walked in wearing a deep plum jacket patterned with round floral medallions. She looked delighted with herself. "You're not doing this alone. I'm right here. When my two boys got married, I handled everything, front to back, top to bottom. The steps, the rules, the order of things.

I know it all." Elowen's shoulders dropped with relief. She'd almost forgotten. She smiled, eyes curving, and waved Elspeth over. "Auntie, come look. Sylvia's moving up the world. Duchess Yvonne personally gave her a bracelet. It's huge. And it's gorgeous." Sylvia's face went red the

second she heard it. Elspeth leaned in to look. "Well, I'll be damned. It really is." in Then she slapped her own thigh like she'd just made a decision. "No. Absolutely not. I have to give you a set of expensive bracelets too." Sylvia blinked. "What?" Elowen started laughing so hard she almost folded over.

1/4 14:44 Sat, Apr 11 Chapter 285 Wedding Prep And A Trap Elspeth pointed casually. "Ella gets a pair too." Elowen froze. "What?" Elspeth didn't even flinch. "I have money. I'm allowed to be unreasonable." Over the next several days, Duskmoor Manor turned into a storm of preparations. 39 Finished Elowen threw herself into Sylvia's wedding as if it were her own responsibility to make everything perfect. The storerooms were opened. Bolt after bolt of fine fabric was carried out and compared. Gold and silver pieces and jewelry were inventoried one by one. Guest menus were drafted and redrafted.

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Return gifts, what kind, how many, how expensive, everything had to be weighed and decided. With Elspeth working alongside her, the two of them often talked through details until late into the night. A few nights, Elowen didn't even bother going back, she slept in the guest room at Elspeth's place. Cassian was left alone in their bed. Before long, word made it back to the Crown Prince's Wing. Tristan reported exactly as he'd been told. "Your Highness, the Duchess of Duskmoor hasn't shared a bed with the Duke in several days." Alaric lifted one eyebrow, pleased.

"So she really is angry with him. So angry she can't even pretend anymore." Tristan didn't comment. It was true Elowen hadn't been sleeping with Cassian. But there were plenty of reasons that could be happening, and resentment wasn't the only one. Tristan was smart enough to keep that thought to himself. There was no point pouring cold water on Alaric's mood. Alaric asked,

"Anything else?" Tristan bowed slightly. "Tomorrow, the Duchess of Duskmoor is going to Falconcrest Manor." Alaric's smile sharpened. "She is? Tomorrow? What time?" Tristan thought it over. "Probably in the afternoon.

It's been cold." Approval flashed across Alaric's eyes. "You even found that out." "That isn't something I had to dig for," Tristan said evenly. "Back when I served beside noticed... the Duchess of Duskmoor doesn't do well in the cold." you, I 2/4 14:44 Sat, Apr 11 U Chapter 285 Wedding Prep And A Trap Alaric paused. 12 Finished "Vanelle's getting colder," Tristan continued. "With her habits, she'll sleep late in the morning. Then she'll eat something after she gets up. If you count it out, she won't leave for Falconcrest Manor until afternoon." The curve of Alaric's mouth fell.

He didn't remember that about Elowen at all. After a long moment, he looked at Tristan, slow, heavy, and pointed. "You pay attention to her." Cold sweat broke across Tristan's back. He dropped to his knees so fast it rattled his bones. "Your Highness, I have absolutely no improper intent toward the Duchess of Duskmoor. I only remember those things because she grew up with you. You carry the realm on your shoulders, so you might not remember small details.

I remembered them for you, that's all." Alaric stayed silent while Tristan babbled through his panic, the words tumbling out in a desperate rush. Finally, Alaric let out a soft laugh that didn't sound particularly kind or particularly angry. "I said it casually. Why are you on the floor?" Tristan didn't dare relax. His forehead stayed low. "Get up," Alaric said, light as dust, and walked toward his desk. "Yes, Your Highness." Tristan rose carefully. Without turning around, Alaric added, "Set it up.

Tomorrow I'm going to Falconcrest Manor." Then he paused and tacked on, "Send someone early to Allen's Confectionery on Fairlight Street. Buy a box of cakes. She likes them. And make sure they go early, Allen's gets a long line every day," Tristan answered and withdrew. Once outside, he shut the door and finally looked down at his hands, His fingers were still trembling.

The next morning, Elowen woke up hazy and half-confused, with the strong sense something was off. She opened her eyes and saw the familiar and saw the familiar canopy overhead, 3/4

14:44 Sat, Apr 11 : admin

Chapter 286 Cakes She clearly remembered sleeping at Elspeth's place the night before. So why am I back here? Did I remember it wrong? Elowen couldn't make it add up, so she gave up and stretched out under the blankets. "Awake?" A low, smooth man's voice came from outside the bed curtains. Finished Elowen pushed her head forward, squeezed half her face out through the slit in the hanging fabric, and looked at Cassian. "I think I sleepwalked." Cassian came in carrying a tray. At that, he laughed under his breath. "Sleepwalked? I carried you back."

Elowen's eyes widened.

"Huh?" Cassian set the tray down, then crossed to the bed. He bent and pinched her cheek where it stuck out past the curtain. "How many nights has it been since you slept with me? Can you count?" Elowen had been lying on her stomach. She rolled over and started counting on her fingers. "One. Two. Three..." "Six," Cassian said. Elowen blinked. "That long?" Cassian looked amused. "If we don't sleep in the same room, people are going to start saying we've fallen apart," Elowen laughed too, then remembered something and shifted gears. "What time is it?"

I'm supposed to go to Falconcrest Manor today." "No rush," Cassian said. "Eat first." Elowen hesitated. "I'm not really hungry," She'd been so busy lately she kept missing meals. Once she

passed the point of hunger, she stopped wanting food at all. "Eat anyway." Cassian pinched her nose this time. "I made you noodles." 1/3 14:44 Sat, Apr 11 Chapter 286 Cakes Elowen froze, then stared. "You did? You can make noodles now?" Cassian lifted one eyebrow. "Want to try them?" Her appetite still wasn't great, but the words Cassian made them were enough. Elowen scrambled up.

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38 Finished When she tried to swing her legs off the bed, Cassian pressed a hand to her shoulder and held her in place. Elowen tilted her head. "What?" "It's cold," Cassian said gently. "Put a cloak on before you get down." Elowen sat obediently while Cassian stood, fetched a new pale, blue cloak, and draped it around her shoulders. He lowered his eyes and focused on tying the ribbons. Elowen watched him for a second, and guilt pricked her. "I forgot to ask the last couple days. Your leg... is it any better?" "Hugh comes every day for treatment," Cassian said.

"No progress lately." "Why not?" Cassian finished the tie and looked at her, the meaning in his eyes too obvious. "Maybe because we haven't shared a bed in six nights?" Elowen's face heated. "That affects it too?" Cassian laughed softly. "I'm kidding. Get up and eat." On the tray was a big bowl of noodles. Simple, meatless, but it looked, and smelled, good enough to be sold at a shop without embarrassment. "I heard your appetite's been off," Cassian said in an unhurried tone. "So I asked the cook to teach me how to make things. I haven't learned real dishes yet.

I started with noodles." Elowen looked from the bowl to him. "You're a duke. And you made me noodles. That's..." Cassian leaned back, lazy and calm. "Outside this house, I'm a duke. In here, I'm your husband. My brother already said once the thing with Warren settles, I should hand off my military work little by little and focus on recovering. Laurent's situation won't wrap up fast. If I'm home anyway, feeding you isn't a big deal." Elowen didn't know what to say. "Try them,"

Cassian said, tipping his chin. 2/3 14:44 Sat, Apr 11 Chapter 286 Cakes 38 Finished Elowen picked up the fork.

She lifted a bite, blew on it, and ate. Cassian waited until she'd swallowed. "Too salty? Too bland?" Elowen smiled. "Neither. It's perfect. It's really good." She meant it. She kept her head down and finished the entire bowl. The broth was hot and soothing. She drank a couple sips, and the warmth spread through her limbs. Her eyes narrowed with satisfaction as she let out a quiet breath. Then she looked up at Cassian, eyes bright, and asked with a shy edge, "Do you have more? I want another half bowl." Elowen ate nearly two bowls before she finally felt right again.

After she washed up and got dressed, she set out for Falconcrest Manor. Today, Elspeth and Sylvia were going to try on the newly tailored wedding robes. Cassian was staying back at the manor to wait for Hugh's treatment. So Elowen went alone. When her carriage stopped, she pushed open the wooden door and immediately spotted a carriage from the Crown Prince's Wing. Alaric was here too. Elowen wasn't surprised. With Mira's help, she stepped down. "Aunt." Alaric spoke first, approaching and offering a graceful bow.

He wore a pale court doublet worked with delicate silver embroidery, a faint wash of blue stitched along the collar and sleeves. The needlework was dense and intricate, yet at first glance the garment appeared effortlessly elegant, the patterns catching the light like a soft shimmer.

1.8K B 512 admin

Chapter 287 Pattern 38 Finished and a finely worked belt His hair was brushed back and secured with a simple silver circlet, rested at his waist. He'd tried on at least ten outfits to choose this one. He'd spent most two hours on it. He knew he was handsome, so he'd even applied a thin layer of powder to brighten his complexion, more alluring, more polished. Alaric's mouth tipped up. She

won't be able to take her eyes off me. He finished his bow and looked up at Elowen. What he saw wasn't admiration. Elowen's expression was flat. She looked at him the way she might look at a robot.

Alaric's confidence faltered. Is the robe wrong? Is the powder too much? Is the hairpiece crooked? Elowen only looked at him twice before turning her eyes away. He was, objectively, striking, tall, well-built, handsome. He stood there and drew attention without trying. If this had been the past, before Elowen's heart had finally gone quiet, she would've been flustered, her gaze stuck on him. But she'd looked at Cassian long enough. She'd seen Cassian stand again when his legs improved, straight-backed and steady. Beside that, Alaric seemed rather unimpressive.

To be perfectly honest, he didn't even come close to Cassian. Elowen started walking into the manor grounds. Alaric quickened his pace to follow. "Running into you here really is fate."

Elowen gave him a lukewarm hum and kept going, "I have something to say," Alaric pressed.

"We don't," Elowen said coolly, "have much to talk about." 7/2 14:44 Sat, Apr 11 Chapter 287

Pattern 38 Finished Alaric's frustration surged. He went straight for it. "I know Cassian keeps a woman outside the manor." Elowen stopped dead. She turned, brows knitting. Her expression went complicated in an instant.

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Alaric caught the shift and smiled, barely. He glanced back. Tristan stepped forward and offered an elegant food box. Alaric said, "The cakes from Allen's on Fairlight Street. You used to love them. Someone waited in line a long time. They're still warm." Elowen didn't even look at the box. Alaric stared at her. "I broug you cakes. You're not happy?" Elowen asked, "Why would I be happy?" Alaric sounded like he expected praise. "I got them for you. The line took nearly two

hours. It's cold out now. That's not an easy line to stand in." Elowen's voice stayed calm and level.

"First, you didn't stand there. Your servant did." Alaric blinked. "Second, I don't even like Allen's. It's too sweet. You like it. Back then I ate it because you wanted it." Alaric froze again. "And last," Elowen finished, "I ate before I came. I'm not hungry. Keep them." The words landed hard. Alaric visibly deflated, as though the breath had been driven from his lungs. After a moment he forced his voice steadier, smaller. "I was trying to be good to you." Elowen finally gave him a short laugh.

"In your head, sending someone else to freeze in a line for two hours, then showing up dressed like you're here to model, is 'being good to me'? Say it out loud and tell me it doesn't sound ridiculous." A cold gust swept through the courtyard and slapped Alaric's face. He flinched, blinking, suddenly sharper. 2/3 14:44 Sat, Apr 11 .. Chapter 287 Pattern He clenched his jaw. "Fine. Then what about Cassian? The woman he's keeping?" Elowen said stubbornly, "That might not be true." (38 Finished Alaric's eyes narrowed. "With your personality, you already sent someone to check.

You know whether it's true." Elowen went still. Alaric's gaze darkened. "Daphne's been watching Duskmoor Manor. She found it first. Then she told me." He lowered his voice, stretching out each word. "I really do want to do something for you." Elowen pressed her lips together. "Why?" Alaric looked at her for a long time. "I've told you. More than once. I like you. I was young. I didn't understand myself and I did a lot wrong. Now I do understand. Even if you married Cassian. Even if I married someone else. What I feel for you hasn't changed." Elowen didn't answer.

"When I heard about the woman, I was shocked," Alaric continued, as if he meant every word.

"And I hated it for you. You married him and he does this so soon? You're good to the bone.

How could he betray you?" 1.8K 1 14:44 Sat, Apr 11 admin

Chapter 288 Help Elowen Elowen still didn't speak. : 38 Finished Alaric leaned into it, voice careful and earnest. "Cassian has power. If you make a scene, you won't win. And your father and brothers are gone. There's no one left to shield you. You only have me. We grew up together. I've never been able to watch you hurt." Elowen tightened her mouth. "So what?" Alaric looked straight at her. "So, Ella, let me help you." Elowen didn't correct the intimate, presumptuous way he said her nickname. Instead, she seemed to consider it. Alaric stepped closer. "Okay?

Give me the chance." He moved in another big step and lowered his voice until it turned almost pleading. "Please. Let me help you." The word please came out clear, too clear, like he'd ground it between his teeth. Elowen had the strange sensation that the plea wasn't humiliating for him at all. It sounded like something he enjoyed in a private way, something that made him feel good. She shut her eyes and took a breath. When she opened them again, pain and sadness had been carefully placed on her face, like a mask. Like everything she'd been holding up finally cracked under his pressure.

She looked up at him. "You really can help me?" Alaric felt relief rush through him, deep and sharp. He answered with absolute certainty, each word deliberate. "Yes. I can." Elowen lowered her head, exposing her neck in a posture of fragile surrender. "But he's the Duke of Duskmoor. His Majesty's own brother." Alaric's eyes burned. "His Majesty's already letting him step back from the military. He hasn't said it outright, but I can tell, His Majesty doesn't want to rely on

him the way he used to. If His Majesty learns Cassian's doing something like this, he'll be disgusted.

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You were married to him by royal decree. Not even a year into it and he keeps a woman outside?

That's putting His Majesty's face in the dirt." "Really?" Elowen asked, eyes red, tears poised to

fall. 1/3 14:44 Sat, Apr 11 Chapter 288 Help Elowen Alaric, living twice now, couldn't stand the

idea of her crying. His brow pulled tight. His voice went even more solemn. "Ella. Trust me. I'll

arrange everything." Elowen hesitated. "Do you need me to do anything?" "No," Alaric said.

"Just wait for my message." "Okay." 38 Finished Elowen nodded and lifted her sleeve to wipe

tears that weren't there.

She sniffed like someone trying to keep herself together. "In this world... you're the only one

who's ever been good to me." It came out low, soft, almost tender. Alaric went still. Something

clenched hard in his chest. He reached for her hand without thinking. He caught nothing. Elowen

turned away at the last second and walked off. Alaric stood where he was, staring after her. In

the past, he had treated her badly. That much was true. And later, he had regretted it, truly. No

one knew what it had been like after she died.

The Crown Prince's Wing had been huge and empty and cold, and his life had felt like something

essential had been buried with her. He'd been crushed under loneliness and regret until he

couldn't breathe. This time, he wasn't going to lose her. "When it's all over..." Alaric murmured,

only for himself, "we'll do it right. No more regrets." "Your Highness." Tristan's voice was low.

He'd hesitated several times before speaking, Alaric blinked back to the present and looked over.

"What?" Tristan paused, choosing his words. "I...

feel like the Duchess of Duskmoor was strange." 2/3 14:44 Sat, Apr 11 Chapter 288 Help

Elowen [↻](#) 0 38 Finished Alaric latched onto the word. "Strange?" "Yes." Tristan tried again. "I don't know how to explain it, but the conversation sounded like she was guiding you toward doing something." Alaric gave a short, contemptuous sound. "What would you Tristan froze. know?" "She looks soft," Alaric went on, "but she's stubborn. She's just still mad at me. She's putting on a show." Tristan's face went blank. Soft isn't exactly the word he uses. Alaric narrowed his eyes.

"She still has me in her heart. That's why she didn't want me taking risks at first." Then he cut Tristan a cold glance. "You wouldn't understand. No one loves you." Tristan said nothing. I really didn't need to say anything. A few days later, Sylvia and Piers' wedding arrived right on schedule. Sylvia had been staying at Duskmoor Manor, so the wedding procession would depart from there. The night before, Elowen was still in Elspeth's rooms. The two of them were excited and busy, still checking the wedding arrangements late into the night. Near dawn, they managed a short doze.

As soon as daylight broke, they were up again. They split their duties: one went to the great hall to receive the arriving guests, while the other stayed with Sylvia until it was time for the bridal procession to depart. 1.8K 1 3/3 admin

Chapter 289 Wedding Elowen was assigned the second role. 38 Finished Rose Hall, the place Marwen used to live, had been handed over to Sylvia after Cassian bundled Marwen and Lucien out and had them removed. Now Sylvia had the whole courtyard to herself. Today she would dress in Rose Hall, put on her wedding robe, and leave in full ceremony. The weather in Vanelle had turned cold again. On the walk over, the morning wind Elowen's cheeks. She rounded a

corner and ran into Elvie, the maid Elowen had assigned as Sylvia's dowry attendant. Elvie was clearly rushing somewhere. Elowen stopped her.

"Why aren't you with Sylvia?" She stepped closer and immediately saw the clear slap mark on Elvie's face. Elowen's brow snapped down. "What happened?" Elvie's eyes were wet. She bowed quickly. "Your Grace... Vivian came." Vivian. Elowen didn't need more to know Sylvia was probably dealing with a problem. "Talk while we walk," Elowen said, and motioned her along. As they moved, Elvie wiped her tears and explained, as simply as she could. Marwen and Lucien were gone, watched closely, there was no way they could stroll back in today. But Vivian was still in Vanelle.

She'd arrived at Duskmoor Manor early. By Cassian's standing rules, Vivian wasn't allowed inside. But today was Vivian's own sister's wedding. No one at the manor could easily block her without making a spectacle. Vivian had come in and skipped any offer of water or rest. She'd gone straight to the bride's room. 1/3 14:46 Sat, Apr 11 . Chapter 289 Wedding And she'd started in on Sylvia. ... 38 Finished "She said Lady Sylvia was ungrateful," Elvie said, voice shaking. "That this is the only wedding she'll ever have, and she didn't even invite her own mother and brother back to watch.

Lady Sylvia didn't argue. She just said Mother and Lucien did wrong. But Vivian kept pushing. She said parents are never wrong. She called Lady Sylvia disloyal, said she'd turned her back on her own family." Elvie's voice broke. "Lady Sylvia was in the middle of getting her hair done. I didn't want her to miss the ceremony time, and I didn't think it was... appropriate... to have Vivian making a scene today. So I tried to stop her. Vivian slapped me." Elvie choked on the last

words. Elowen's jaw tightened. Vivian was unpleasant on a normal day. But something about this didn't sit right.

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Cassian had thought to watch Marwen and Lucien. He wouldn't have forgotten Vivian. So either someone dropped the ball, or there was something else behind it. After a brief pause, Elowen looked at Elvie and spoke gently. "That was humiliating. I'm sorry. But you handled it well." Elvie's tears spilled faster. "Go get some ointment after this," Elowen added. "Don't let it bruise. And since today is Sylvia's wedding, the wedding gratuity you were meant to receive-you'll be given an extra one." Elvie bowed again and again, overwhelmed. They reached the wedding room.

Before Elowen even touched the door, she heard Sylvia's voice inside, controlled, steady.

"Vivian, you're welcome to attend my wedding. But if you came here to make me miserable, don't blame me when I stop caring about 'sisterly affection.'" Vivian answered with a cold laugh.

"Mother was right about you. You grew up with Father, and you've been spoiled rotten since you were little. Now you don't care about your mother, you don't care about your brother, and you don't care about me either. Your world is just an aunt and Elowen. Where do I fit in?

Nowhere," Then Vivian's voice turned sharper, crueler, "And don't think marrying into Falconcrest Manor makes you better than me. You think you'll have it easy there? I can barely breathe in Richardson Manor. You think Falconcrest will treat you gently? That Duchess will look at you 2/3 14:46 Sat, Apr 11 Chapter 289 Wedding like dirt." Elowen stepped into the room right on that line. Sylvia sat at the vanity, hair half arranged.

38 Finished It was the biggest day of her life, and there was no glow on her face, just a tightness at the brow, fatigue, and a flicker of irritation she was trying to swallow. When Sylvia saw Elowen, her eyes reddened immediately. She started to speak, about to call her, Elowen gave a small shake of her head. Sylvia swallowed the words and turned back to the mirror. A bright wedding robe hung on a stand nearby. Vivian stood beside it, looking it up and down with open disdain. She kept talking, as though Elowen had not yet arrived.

"And that duchess you're so eager to cling to," Vivian sneered. "Do you really think she's so good to you? You're not even blood. Her family name is Wrenner. Yours is Ashcroft. She's only putting on a show. Don't be foolish enough to hand her your whole heart. Who knows what she says about you when you're not around." Elowen lifted one eyebrow. "Is that so?" Vivian spun around. The moment she saw Elowen, a flicker of panic crossed her face-quick and instinctive. She forced it down, trying to gather her composure. She was a marchioness now. She was the bride's elder sister. She had standing.

Elowen smiled pleasantly. "How is it that the Marchioness of Richardson is here, yet no one has seen to her comfort?" Vivian's mouth curled into a final, smug smile. Of course, Elowen wouldn't dare do anything to her, At Elowen's side, Gerda and Edith stepped forward immediately. 1.8K admin

Chapter 290 Locked 0: 38 Finished Elowen tipped her chin slightly toward Vivian. "Take her to the next room. Lock the door. Unless I say otherwise, she is not to leave." Her voice remained calm, almost gentle. Vivian stiffened, the color draining from her face. "I'm a marchioness-" Gerda and Edith didn't let her finish. One seized Vivian's arms while the other clamped a firm

hand over her mouth. Vivian's protest dissolved into muffled, furious sounds. Elowen kept smiling. "And I am the Duchess of Duskmoor." Then she gave a light gesture.

"Go on." /// The two older women hauled Vivian away, more forceful than polite, dragging her through the doorway. On the floor lay a silver hairpin, dropped during Vivian's struggle. Elowen bent and picked it up. "Elowen... I'm sorry." Sylvia's voice was small. Elowen held the hairpin and looked up. "Why are you apologizing?" Sylvia lowered her head. "You keep having to deal with problems because of me." Elowen's smile came easy. "I'm not dealing with the problem. Your sister is. She's the one locked in a room." Sylvia didn't brighten. Her shoulders stayed slumped. "I don't know why, but...

part of me feels like she wasn't completely wrong. Who gets married with their mother and brother not there? What kind of wedding is that?" Elowen went quiet. Marwen and Lucien hadn't treated Sylvia well. That much was clear. But she was still family. Blood wasn't nothing. And people weren't made out of pure cruelty, Marwen and Lucien had probably given Sylvia warmth sometimes too, even if it was 1/3 14:46 Sat, Apr 11 U Chapter 290 Locked inconsistent. On a day like this, it was normal for Sylvia's heart to waver.

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After a moment, Elowen said, "When you go to the hall, you'll understand why it doesn't matter." Sylvia looked up, confused. "Why?" 38 Finished Elowen didn't answer directly. "You'll see. For now, finish getting ready. Falconcrest's wedding party will be here soon." Sylvia nodded. She took a breath and looked at herself in the mirror again. A stool was brought over. Elowen sat and watched. A maid applied scented powder and smoothed Sylvia's complexion. Another dabbed color onto her cheeks. When they finished, Sylvia's skin looked pale with a natural flush.

"Press your lips together," the attendant said with a smile, offering a small parchment square brushed with crimson lip pigment. Sylvia followed the instruction, pressing her lips gently against it. When she pulled back, her mouth was tinted a full, vivid red. Next, they settled the bridal circlet in place. Then came the wedding gown. It was a deep crimson gown, richly crafted and embroidered with gold thread and bright silks. The patterns were intricate and precise. And Sylvia had sewn it herself.

At first, Elspeth and Elowen had wanted to hire the finest seamstresses in Vanelle-some of them former palace artisans-to make Sylvia's wedding gown. But Sylvia had shaken her head softly. "I know you could arrange that. I just... want to make it myself." Her cheeks had warmed as she explained. "If I sew it with my own hands, it feels... meaningful. Like a promise. As if the marriage will begin under a good sign.

That we'll grow old together." Back then, Elowen had grown a little distant, In her previous life, when she married Alaric, she had sewn her own wedding gown too, stitch by stitch, with her own hands. 2/3 14:46 Sat, Apr 11 Chapter 290 Locked 38 Finished And that marriage had not been smooth at all. Elspeth had grumbled, "Whether a marriage turns out well has nothing to do with who stitched the gown. Let a seamstress do it.

You'll ruin your eyes and your hands." Elowen had smiled and said, "Let her make it." Then she had added, quietly but clearly, "Whether a marriage turns out well depends entirely on the man you marry. But if you sew the gown yourself, you'll walk into the ceremony with a joyful heart." Now Elowen understood something more clearly than ever. The pain she had lived through was not because she had done anything wrong. She had married with hope. That was not wrong. 1.8K

(admin

