

Awakening Love: Reborn to Be His Duchess Novel

Chapter 291 Awkward : She had tried to make the marriage work afterward. That was not wrong either. Alaric simply had not deserved it. 38 Finished Piers was far kinder than Alaric. If he learned that Sylvia had stitched her own wedding gown for him, he would probably have been deeply moved. From then on, he would have treasured her like something precious, fussing over her at the slightest sign she might be unwell. "Your Grace," Anson called from outside, "Falconcrest's party has arrived." Sylvia turned her head so quickly the circlet's delicate pendants swayed.

"Is he here?" Anson's voice carried a grin. "The moment he arrived, he asked where the bride was. But the countess stopped him at the gate. She said he must prove himself first." It was an old wedding tradition-friends and family teasing the groom before allowing him to see his bride. Sylvia sat very still, her hands clasped tightly in her lap. Elowen leaned closer and covered Sylvia's hand with her own. "Don't worry. They'll probably make him recite a few lines of poetry or hit a target in the courtyard. He'll manage it easily. And your aunt knows you're eager.

She won't keep him waiting outside for long." Sylvia's face flushed a deeper red. She lowered her gaze. Outside, the noise swelled-cheers, laughter, and the constant bustle of men running back and forth with updates. "Three verses! Everyone's applauding!" "He cleared the second challenge! Didn't miss a single shot!" "He's in the great hall! He's presented the ceremonial gift to the Duke!" The appointed hour had arrived. Inside the room, an older attendant called out brightly, "The bride is ready!" Outside, Caelan, the fifth prince, was already waiting.

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Tradition required a male relative of the bride to escort her into the hall. Lucien was not considered worthy of the honor, and there was no suitable man from the Ashcroft family available. 1/3 Chapter 291 Awkward Finished Elira had proposed Caelan. Theodric was Sylvia's cousin, and Caelan had the proper standing. Having a royal prince escort her out would bring Sylvia great distinction. Caelan offered Sylvia his arm and escorted her into the hall. Cassian was present, though he was not seated in the place of honor. The two seats reserved for the family elders stood empty.

At the center of the hall stood a small memorial table, where a dark-framed portrait of Aldric rested in silence. Sylvia saw it and broke. Tears streamed down her face at once. Her voice trembled as she whispered, "Father..." It was a memorial portrait of Aldric. That was what Elowen had meant: even without her mother and brother, Sylvia was not alone. Her father was here, in the only way he could be, witnessing the most important moment of her life. Sylvia wept before the tablet until she could barely breathe. Piers, standing nearby, had reddened eyes as well.

He stepped forward before the memorial and bowed his head solemnly. "Sir, I swear before you that for the rest of my life I will treat Sylvia with my whole heart. I will never allow her to suffer even the smallest injustice. We will grow old together, and I will never betray her." Elspeth was already crying openly, wiping her face again and again with a handkerchief. Seated beside Cassian, Elowen felt her own nose sting.

Once the final formalities were finished, Piers helped Sylvia to her feet, carefully smoothing the folds of her gown before taking her hand and leading her toward the waiting carriage. The music and chatter gradually faded as the procession moved away. Slowly, the hall grew quiet. Cassian

glanced at Elowen. "Did you cry?" Elowen sniffed. "Almost." Then she remembered Vivian. "I need to go to the back courtyard." Cassian didn't ask why. He only nodded. "Go." 2/3 14:46 Sat, Apr 11 G Chapter 291 Awkward Elowen turned back toward the side rooms.

38 Finished Even before she reached the door, she could hear Vivian's hoarse, relentless screaming. "Let me out! I'm a marchioness! You bastards-how dare you lock me up!" Over and over, the same two lines, until her voice sounded raw. Elowen signaled the guard. The lock clicked open. Vivian stopped mid-scream, thinking it had worked. She lifted her chin and glared toward the doorway. Then she saw Elowen standing there, backlit, her face cold. Vivian's bravado faltered. She tried to steady herself. "You... you can't just imprison a noblewoman.

You think being the Duchess of Duskmoor makes you untouchable?" Elowen didn't react. Her voice remained flat. "How did you get in?" Vivian blinked. "You're the one who locked me in!" She's right... Elowen didn't move. "I asked how you entered Duskmoor Manor today.". eyes darted Vivian's eyes away. "In a carriage, obviously." 1.8K 1 14:46 Sat, Apr 11 G admin

Chapter 292 Stare : 38 Finished Elowen stared at her, her gaze sharp and cold. "Vivian. You know what I'm asking. Think carefully before you answer." Vivian's spine went cold beneath that look, cold in a way she could not explain. It feels familiar. Like Cassian. Vivian's pupils widened as realization hit. Somewhere along the way, Elowen had started to carry Cassian's shadow.

Elowen's patience ran out. She turned her head slightly. "Someone...". "I'll talk!" Vivian blurted. "I'll talk, okay!" Elowen looked back at her. Vivian clenched her jaw. "It was the Baker family.

Someone from the Baker family helped me." Elowen's eyes deepened. The Baker family. Is it Laurent, still holding a grudge over Cassian throwing him in prison? Clarisse-angry Or...Her Majesty? because Cassian's methods ruin Geoffrey? Vivian took Elowen's silence for disbelief

and poured the rest out in a rush. "They told me the court isn't peaceful right now. A lot of officials are impeaching Cassian. They said the realm is stable now, and he should follow the old rules and leave Vanelle for his lands instead of staying here. They said he has too much power in the Vanelle.

That it's improper." Vivian kept going, as if she couldn't stop once she'd started. "They even said Cassian and you are too far apart in age. That it's wrong. That you're a lone general's daughter and you should've married a noble son your own age. That marrying Cassian is beneath you, like you're being wronged." Elowen's brow tightened. So this was Alaric's play, having his people push attacks against Cassian in court. Vivian swallowed. "They said all of it. I wasn't going to come, but when they said that, I thought... maybe it was safe." 1/3 14:46 Sat, Apr 11 ...

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Chapter 292 Stare : 38 Finished Elowen didn't answer. Vivian looked at her. "So now you'll let me go?" Elowen's voice cooled further. "Not yet. Once Sylvia is settled safely in Falconcrest Manor, you can leave." She needed the day to end cleanly. Vivian opened her mouth to argue. Elowen turned away. The door shut again, and the lock dropped into place. Vivian's screaming started up immediately. Elowen ignored it and began walking back, only to run into someone she hadn't expected. Kaelan. He wore a dark robe and looked thin, thinner than he'd been at the autumn hunt.

He stood still, brows faintly drawn, eyes complicated as he looked at Elowen. Only then did Elowen realize how long it had been since she'd seen him.. Back when Alaric had snapped and caused a scene, Kaelan was one of the few who'd spoken up for her. After that, Elowen had been unconscious for days. Then depressed. Then slowly healed by Cassian. Somewhere in all of

that, she hadn't checked on Kaelan once. Guilt rose again. Kaelan spoke first, quietly, as if offering an explanation. "After the hunt, I got sick. Then I stayed home studying.

I'm preparing for the civil examinations next spring. My mother has high expectations. She's strict, so... I haven't had time to come see you." Elowen blinked. He sounded apologetic. That was unusual enough to put a sour feeling in her stomach. She let a small, polite smile show. "It's fine. Then I'll wish you success." 2/3 14:46 Sat, Apr 11 G Chapter 292 Stare Kaelan nodded once. "Mm." : Elowen felt the air between them turning strange, uneven. She wanted to leave. 38 Finished Kaelan spoke again, lower. "What Marchioness of Richardson said just now...

I heard it too." He meant the court talk, the impeachments. Elowen didn't know how to respond, so she didn't. Kaelan continued. "I've heard similar things from my mother. More than once. She said the attacks against Cassian are getting louder. His Majesty has protected him out of brotherly affection, but when enough people repeat something... eventually it can affect anyone. Even His Majesty." Elowen managed a soft sound. "Mm." Kaelan wet his dry lips. Then, as if he'd gathered every ounce of courage he'd ever had, he stepped closer. "I wanted to say...

Your Grace," he said, voice strained with sincerity, "if one day Cassian truly loses power, you can leave him. You don't have to be trapped. You won't have nowhere to go. You... you can come to me." Elowen froze. Kaelan rushed to add, "I'm serious. And I'll protect you. And we're close in age. We can, Pas the " meminations next year. I will. I'll be able to 1.8K 。 admin

Chapter 293 Steal He blushed, heat rising into his face. Elowen's earlier bad feeling settled into certainty. She had words, but none she could safely say right now. 38 Finished Kaelan saw the hesitation and immediately stepped back, quick and embarrassed. "I'm not asking you to decide today. I'm not forcing anything. I just wanted you to know you have a way out. So you can feel

safe." He bowed, then turned and left before Elowen could stop him. Elowen stood where she was for a moment, then let out a slow breath. This is a mess. She turned back toward the inner courtyard, mind noisy.

She'd barely passed a stand of bamboo when a voice drifted out from behind a rockery, dark, edged with mockery. "Aunt really is popular. The old ones like you. The young ones like you. Even younger ones like you." Elowen stopped. Alaric stood there with his hands behind his back, expression laced with sarcasm. He'd seen her with Kaelan. He'd heard Kaelan's confession. Elowen only shrugged. "So I'm not stuck relying on you." Alaric's brows lifted. "Oh?" Elowen's voice stayed flat. "If you don't help me, I have other options." Alaric paused, then laughed quietly.

He remembered why he'd liked Elowen in the first place, She'd always been different. Other noble girls followed rules. Elowen didn't. If Alaric got angry, normal girls would beg for forgiveness. Elowen would glare back and say she'd hit him if he didn't knock it off. And somehow, that used to make him feel better. In his last life, part of why he'd resented Elowen was because his mother disliked her, and he'd been punished because of it. But even then, he shouldn't have spent years without ever touching his wife.

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He hadn't touched her because she'd turned into someone bland, someone like every other woman, and he'd lost interest. And yet, she was the only woman who'd ever truly loved him, and the only one he'd ever truly loved. Now, coming back into this life, he saw Elowen was like she used to be again. Maybe even more. He wanted her so badly it made him feel unsteady. "Aunt," Alaric said, stepping closer, voice smooth, "don't worry. Everything's progressing exactly the

way I planned. Cassian keeps a woman outside? I'll make him pay for it. I'll get your revenge."

Then he lowered his voice.

"But afterward... you should repay me." Elowen looked at him. "Repay you?" "For example," Alaric said, gaze fixed on her face, "be my crown princess again." Elowen stared. Alaric smiled, almost indulgent. "I know what you're thinking. Daphne is already in my wing. I feel nothing for her. I married her because I had to. Give it time and I'll find a reason to get rid of her. I can divorce her, or if you want, I can give her to you as a personal maid." Elowen's gaze didn't soften. "You'd better mean what you say." Then she left him with a single word.

"Goodbye." She walked past him without slowing. Behind her, Alaric raised his voice. "Aunt, I swear I will!" Elowen didn't turn around. 2/4 14:46 Sat, Apr 11 Chapter 293 Steal ... : When he said "be my crown princess again," the meaning was too clear. In his memory, this wasn't the first time. At that point, Elowen was certain. 38 Finished Alaric had come back too. The next day, there was no court session. Theodric's head ached from hearing officials complain about Cassian. He dismissed court for several days just to have some peace. Alaric got word Cassian had taken the carriage north again.

He skipped breakfast and went straight to see Theodric. Theodric had spent the night in Elira's quarters. Elira was helping him dress when word came that the Crown Prince had arrived.

Theodric's brow creased. "What does he want now?" Quin answered, "Your Highness said it's urgent." Theodric's face stayed cold. "Make him wait." A quarter hour later, Theodric finally stepped out and looked at Alaric, who'd been waiting outside. "Speak." Alaric's expression was composed. "Father, it concerns something serious. We should discuss it in your study."

Theodric's gaze sharpened.

woman outside. Cassian had waited years to marry because he'd insisted he already had someone in his heart. So why would he marry Elowen and then keep a mistress? It made no sense.

Theodric didn't respond immediately.

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Alaric struck his head to the floor again, the sound crisp against the stone, "Your Majesty! This is absolutely true. It concerns royal honor and your brotherhood with Cassian. I would never dare lie. If Your Majesty doubts me, send men with me to the northern villa and see it yourself." His tone was so earnest it stirred doubt despite Theodric's instincts, Could it be true? In the end, Theodric decided the simplest thing was to verify it. 1/3 14:46 Sat, Apr 11 Chapter 294 Catch Truth or falsehood would be obvious once they were there. "Quin," Theodric called. Quin stepped forward.

"Choose a team of reliable guards. Go with the Crown Prince to the northern villa." 38 Finished Theodric's gaze hardened. "If Cassian truly has a woman there, bring her into the palace at once." Quin hesitated for a half beat, stunned, then bowed. "Yes, Your Majesty." He quickly selected a group of elite guards, skilled and discreet, and they set out with Alaric for the north. Alaric rode hard, full of triumph. Plenty of men kept mistresses. For ordinary officials and rich heirs, it earned gossip, maybe a mild reprimand. But Cassian wasn't ordinary.

For years Cassian had been praised for refusing to marry, claiming devotion to a single woman. People had praised him like he was some rare standard of faithful love. If he'd married and then immediately kept a mistress, that image would shatter. And he'd married Elowen of all people, the lone daughter of a revered general house. The military would not sit quietly if she was wronged. Alaric had already set people in court to pressure Cassian for days. If the accusation became fact, Cassian wouldn't be able to remain in Vanelle without consequences.

Then Alaric would find a way to push Elowen into divorce. And when she was free, he could bring Ella into the Crown Prince's Wing exactly as he believed fate intended. They reached the villa. The guards spread out in practiced formation, sealing exits and surrounding the grounds. Alaric and Quin went straight through the main gate with several close guards. 2/3 14:46 Sat, Apr 11 Chapter 294 Catch Alaric swept his eyes over the courtyard and saw a familiar carriage, Duskmoor Manor's. He lifted his chin. "So he's here today too." Quin said nothing, only let out a quiet breath.

The villa was large, with multiple buildings and courtyards. 38 Finished As they debated where to search first, they spotted faint curls of cooking smoke rising in the distance. Alaric's voice turned mocking. "No wonder he keeps coming here. It feels like a home." They followed the smoke and the smell. The courtyard they reached had expensive chrysanthemum plants. The cold had withered most of them. But the air was thick with the aroma of food, rich enough to make a person hungry. Alaric gave her how she keeps him coming back." a humorless smile. "Must be a good cook.

That Quin stopped before a closed door and looked strained, unwilling. 1.8K M 1 admin

Chapter 295 Truth Alaric's eyes ordered him forward. And then the door opened from inside. :

38 Finished Cassian sat in his wheelchair, face as cold and controlled as ever. Bran stood behind him, hands on the grips, as if they were about to heave. Cassian looked mildly surprised to find a crowd waiting. Quin forced himself forward and Alaric bowed too. "Uncle." boke of Duskmoor." Cassian rested an arm on the chair's armrest. His voice was calm. "How did you find this place?" Quin's discomfort sharpened. He didn't know how to answer.

Alaric said, "His Majesty has questions for you." Cassian gave a flat hum. "Convenient. I also have matters to discuss with His Majesty." Alaric's mouth lifted. "It isn't only you who needs to go." Cassian looked at him. Alaric said, "The young woman inside should come as well." Cassian's brow tightened almost imperceptibly. "Who?" Alaric laughed under his breath. "Uncle, at the ho Majesty knows." Cassian's frown deepened. "What?" point, why play dumb? We already know. His Alaric said each word clearly. "That you've been keeping a woman here." Cassian paused.

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"A woman?" Alaric continued smoothly, like a man certain he'd won. "Tell her to come out. His Majesty is waiting. If His Majesty is in a generous mood, she might even be granted a position. If not... her life could be at risk." The room inside stayed quiet for a beat. 1/3 3) Chapter 295 Truth Then footsteps. Someone came out. Alaric stared into the doorway, triumphant. What emerged wasn't a soft, beautiful woman. Finished It was a broad-shouldered man, tall, thick through the chest, darkened skin roughened by years of wind and grit. He wore a worn, plain robe.

His face was soldier-handsome and weathered. He scratched his head awkwardly, voice booming. "Your Highness... I'm married. My daughter is old enough to marry herself. And I'm a man. You're as to be a 'side consort' to the Duke of Duskmoor? That's... not appropriate. I don't want doesn't want to either." Alaric stood frozen. His mind buzzed like it had been struck. , and I'm pretty sure the Duke Quin's surprise flashed across his face for a moment. Then the He stepped forward and bowed. "Warren." palace veteran regained himself. Warren immediately returned the salute with clasped hands.

"Lord Jett." still a woman in there!" "No," Alaric snapped, finally finding his voice. "You're a cover. There's sti Warren started to speak. Alaric shoved past him and stormed into the room, www like a madman. He yanked open the bed curtains, bent to check underneath, threw open cabinets, even looked up toward the beams, every corner that might hide someone. There was nothing. The food on the table was set for one. Alaric's face drained as his sweat turned cold. "Impossible," he muttered. "Where is she?" Cassian stayed seated in the doorway, watching as if mildly entertained.

He propped his cheek in his hand and offered, lazily, "Check the desk drawers too. Maybe she's hiding in there." Alaric, out of his mind with frustration, actually did it. He yanked open a drawer. 2/3 14:46 Sat, Apr 11 Chapter 295 Truth. Inside were a few local records and an inkstone. Nothing else. : 38 Finished Only then did Alaric snap back to himself and realize how stupid he looked. A drawer couldn't fit a living person. He'd been toyed with. Shame crawled across his face. "There was smoke," Alaric said, clinging to it. "And food. Someone was cooking.

That's real." Warren raised a hand, hesitant. "That was me. Back home I cooked for my wife all the time. After years in Nordia, I was worried I'd forgotten. So I've been practicing. Men can cook too." Alaric whipped around and glared at him. "Then why are you hiding here?" 1.8K W 1 3/3 14:46 Sat, Apr 11 ... admin

Chapter 296 Hidden 38 Finished Warren straightened, expression serious. "Your Highness, I was held in Nordia for years. A while ago I found a gap and escaped, barely. Avenlor's situation with Nordia is delicate. My return can't be public yet. If it's exposed too early, it could invite trouble. It could even draw Nordian agents. The Duke placed me here to protect me, and to protect the

stability of our borders." Alaric gritted his teeth. "Even so, Cassian doesn't need to come here this often." Warren didn't blink. "He comes to discuss matters related to Nordia.

And he comes to learn cooking from me. He said he wants to make food for the Duchess of Duskmoor. The Duke and Duchess are close." Then, as if trying to be helpful, he asked, "Do you have anything else you want to ask, Your Highness?" Alaric couldn't find a single hole to tear open. His face stayed pale. Warren looked to Quin. "Lord Jett, you said His Majesty summoned someone? Sounds like there was supposed to be a 'young woman. Do I still need to go?" Quin inhaled, then glanced at the Crown Prince, who looked half-dead with humiliation, before turning back toward Cassian and Warren.

"This appears to be a misunderstanding. Duke of Duskmoor. Lieutenant Wrenner. Please come to the palace and explain matters before His Majesty." On the way back, the carriage jolted over the road, but Alaric's mind jolted worse. He knew Warren's history. Warren had been captured in battle by Nordia and had refused to surrender. Nordia wanted Avenlor's military intelligence and hadn't killed him quickly. He'd been imprisoned for years, Theodric often praised him in court, bravery, loyalty, a hero worth mourning.

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Warren's escape had been recent, and Cassian had gone to retrieve him In Alaric's last life, the public commendation for Warren had happened later than this. But Alaric remembered it.

Theodric had called Warren "the backbone of Avenlor, a hero of the realm." 1/3 14:46 Sat, Apr 11 U Chapter 296 Hidden : 38 Finished Words like that were the highest honor imaginable. And today, the Crown Prince had brought the emperor's own attendant and guards to "catch" Cassian's mistress. And instead, he'd dragged a national hero into the mess. Alaric's heart raced. His palms stayed slick.

With Theodric's temperament, Alaric would likely be confined again, barred from court. And those officials Alaric had arranged to impeach Cassian over the last several days would probably be blamed as well. No. He couldn't just accept this. He needed someone to carry the blame, someone he could claim had given him false information. As Alaric stepped into the study, he took a breath, ready to say the rehearsed line, he had been fooled, he had been deceived, but Cassian spoke first. Cassian's voice was calm, almost mild. "Your Majesty.

My conduct has been improper and I'm unworthy of responsibility. Please remove all my duties. Strip me of my title." Alaric's eyes snapped wide. Theodric, already worn down by recent headaches, blinked, then slammed a palm down on the desk. The heavy wood boomed. The brush stand jumped. "You did keep a mistress?!" Theodric roared. Cassian said nothing. His stillness looked like confirmation. Alaric lunged forward. "Your Majesty, that isn't, Uncle, he..." "Shut up!" Theodric snapped at Alaric. "You came to me with this accusation.

Now you want to defend him?" Theodric pointed at Cassian, furious and wounded. "What did you say when you begged for 2/3 14:46 Sat, Apr 11 . Chapter 296 Hidden 38 Finished that marriage? You swore you loved her. I gave her to you with my own decree. And this is what you do? She's alone in the world. Her father and brothers died for this realm. If you don't treat her well, who does she have? Who is she supposed to depend on?" Theodric's voice rose higher. "And I was sitting here trying to protect you from rumors, trying to keep court quiet.

I was covering for you, and you do something like this? You disappoint me." Cassian didn't defend himself. Not one word. 1.8K (i) 1 admin

Chapter 297 Fury Alaric was panicking. "Your Majesty, I... ' "O "Where is she?" Theodric demanded, ignoring him. "Bring her here. I want to see what kind of beauty could make Cassian

lose his senses. A wife like the Duchess of Duskmoor, and he still does this?" Warren's scalp tightened. He swallowed, then edged forward a fraction. "Your Majesty... I think... I'm the 'mistress.'" you served Theodric stared. Then his anger twisted into something like disbelief. "I know Cassian and you're loyal. But you have a wife and a grown daughter.

What are you doing pretending to be some delicate little kept woman? Do you think I'm senile? Do you think I'm stupid? Cassian isn't blind enough to take you as a mistress." Warren shrank back, at a loss, and looked toward Quin for help. Quin bowed and took over. "Your Majesty, I went to the northern villa with the Crown Prince. We searched thoroughly. There was no woman. Only the Duke of Duskmoor and General Warren. The Duke placed the general there in secret for safety. The rumor of a mistress appears to have spread from misunderstanding and false repetition." Theodric froze.

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His rage stuck halfway up his throat. So he'd just unleashed all of that at Cassian for nothing? Embarrassment hit him hard. He rubbed his brow, then looked at Cassian with a guilt that showed through the why didn't you say that? Why did you let me yell at you?" anger. "Then "And that nonsense about giving up your title," Theodric added, exasperated. "You made me think you were confessing." Cassian lowered his eyes. "I apologize. Even if I have no mistress, the court has been in turmoil over me. It's caused trouble for you and unrest in the government. That part is true.

One way or another, the storm has circled around me. If stepping down quiets it, if it gives you peace, then I'll do it." Theodric's expression softened, something close to genuine feeling surfacing in his eyes. After all, they were still family. 1/3 Chapter 297 Fury Finished Cassian had been wronged, and his first instinct had still been to protect his brother and the court's dignity.

Theodric looked at him with unmistakable affection. "Don't be ridiculous. You've done nothing wrong. You are my brother. I wouldn't be sitting here without you. Your title stays.

As long as I'm alive, no one takes you down. No one." Then he raised his voice. "Bring rewards."

Quin asked carefully, "For the Duke of Duskmoor, Your Majesty?" Theodric waved a hand.

"And for the Duchess too." Quin bowed and moved to prepare it. Cassian sighed. "Your Majesty.

I never helped you because I wanted rewards. If you're healthy, if Avenlor is stable, if the people live in peace, that's enough." Theodric looked like he might actually tear up. Alaric looked like

he might snap his teeth. Then Theodric turned his fury back on his son. "And you," Theodric said, voice dropping into ice.

"You swore to me he kept a woman. You made this entire farce." 17 Alaric dropped to his knees immediately, face pale. "Dad, I was misled. I listened to," "Don't call me that," Theodric cut in.

"I've corrected you. In court you address properly." Alaric's throat tightened. He tried again,

stumbling. "Your Majesty... but Cassian..." "You're still talking about Cassian?" Theodric

barked. "You want to compare yourself to him? Look at him. He's straightforward. He's loyal.

And you?" Cassian turned his head and looked at Alaric.

Where Theodric couldn't see, Cassian's mouth tipped into a faint, taunting half-smile. Alaric's eyes widened. He looked to Theodric, "Your Majesty, look at him!" Theodric didn't. His patience

was already gone. "Go back to the Crown Prince's Wing. Starting today, you're confined for one month. No leaving without my decree. Don't attend court either." Alaric went numb.. 2/3 14:47

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Chapter 298 Confined He didn't even remember how he got back. 38 Finished Only that he ended up collapsed in front of his desk, mind grinding, trying to find where his plan had broken.

"Your Highness," Tristan said solemnly, standing in front of him. "If I may... today's outcome is likely the Duchess of Duskmoor's design." Alaric turned slowly. "What did you say?" Tristan's voice stayed steady. "You did all of this for her. You told His Majesty about the 'mistress' for her sake.

But looking back, it appears she orchestrated it, planned ahead, understood your temperament, and guided you step by step into a trap." At Duskmoor Manor, Elowen had been in a good creative spell. After reviewing the estate accounts, she spread a fresh sheet of paper and wrote two words: Cayla. That was the name of her new story's heroine. Lately she'd realized too many stories painted their heroines as nothing but innocent and sweet. Sweet wasn't bad. It just got stale. Elowen wanted to write a woman with ambition. A woman with schemes. A woman who calculated and won.

None of those things belonged only to men. In her outline, Cayla came from the countryside. At fifteen, she had a dream: to live in a big house with multiple courtyards, to have endless plain dinner rolls, to eat meat once a month until she was full, and to have ten taels of silver every day to spend however she wanted. And then, when she entered a wealthy household, Cayla discovered their homes weren't just "big." They didn't eat plain rolls, they ate fragrant rice and noodles, and meat whenever they wanted. Ten dollars wasn't even enough to cover a single meal...

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"Your Grace." 1/3 14:47 Sat, Apr 11 Chapter 298 Confined Mira's voice cut in. Elowen didn't look up at first, only gave a distracted "Hm?" Then she realized, no. She'd told Mira not to interrupt unless Cassian returned. Mira calling now meant, Cassian was back. Elowen listened. 38 Finished She heard the faint sound of the wheelchair. page was She stopped writing so fast

her hand almost smeared the ink. Without caring that the still wet, she folded it twice and shoved it under a stack of books, then pulled the account ledger back in front of her and pretended to read.

The wheelchair stopped outside. Cassian rose and walked in. Elowen sat with her head lowered, expression serious, eyes on the ledger. A few books sat by her hand. The corner of the folded page peeked out. Cassian's gaze paused briefly on that paper edge, then slid away. He sat beside her. Unhurried, Cassian said, "Today the Crown Prince took Quin to the villa. He saw Warren. Then we went to the palace together and met with His Majesty." Elowen lifted her head. She'd known, even before the trip to Sunspire Hill, that Cassian often went to a particular villa.

She knew it grew chrysanthemums, sometimes she caught the scent on him. At first, she'd respected his privacy and didn't ask. Then she'd heard the rumor he kept a mistress. That night, when Cassian climbed into bed after washing up, Elowen had asked casually, "Cassian, I heard you keep a mistress?" She remembered her own tone. It hadn't been accusatory, Cassian had immediately dropped onto his knees on the bed. "Ella, I don't. I would never." Elowen had panicked too, quickly pushing herself upright. "I didn't say I believed it.

I only heard the rumor and asked what was going on." They had both been caught off guard. 2/3
14:47 Sat, Apr 11 . Chapter 298 Confined 38 Finished Cassian had remained bowed as he laid out the entire matter in careful detail from beginning to end. After Elowen understood, she looked at him and said, "I believe you. Please don't do that again. It's terrifying." Only then did Cassian straighten and take his seat properly. Then he'd asked her, "Didn't you say you wanted Alaric to stop being Crown Prince?" So they'd used it.

They let Alaric believe Cassian truly had a woman outside, and that Elowen was hurt. Duskmoor Manor was usually sealed tight, but recently Cassian had allowed a few "leaks" to slip out: he and Elowen were distant, even sleeping apart. When Elowen saw Alaric, she guided him with hints until he decided to strike. Alaric did, sending his people to attack Cassian in court. Cassian ignored it all. Elowen had been waiting for the best moment to close the trap. Then yesterday, while Sylvia's wedding was underway, Kaelan's words had been overheard by Alaric at the perfect time.

So today, Elowen had suggested Cassian go to the villa again. Bait on a hook. Alaric bit. Now Elowen asked, "What did His Majesty decide?" Cassian said, "One month confinement. No court." 1.8K 11 admin

Chapter 299 Disappointed Elowen's shoulders sank. "He's still Crown Prince." Cassian gave a quiet sound of agreement. "It wasn't big enough. Not yet." Elowen let out a breath. Finished Cassian added, "But small things stack. When they stack high enough, they turn into something that can't be ignored. I promised you he'd pay. I promised you he'd stop being Crown Prince. I mean it." Something in Elowen softened. She leaned over and hugged him, voice low. "Thank you." Cassian held her and smoothed a hand down her back. "His Majesty also rewarded us.

There are gifts for you too." Elowen tilted her head, surprised. "Me too?" Cassian nodded.

"They're outside. Once they're logged, they'll go into storage. Want to look?" Elowen's eyes lit up. "Yes." She liked looking at those things, gold, jewelry, rare pieces. And it would help her write. She could pull details from the actual imperial rewards and put them into her story. Back in the Crown Prince's Wing, Alaric stared at Tristan like he'd heard madness. "Elowen... set me

up?" Alaric rejected it instantly. "That's impossible." Tristan's eyes widened slightly. Alaric's face tightened.

"She loves me. She would never plot against me. And she's kind. She's simple. She couldn't think up something like this." Tristan didn't move. He tried again. "But..." Alaric ground out, "Someone interfered." At that moment, a soft, gentle voice floated in from the doorway. "Your Highness." 1/3 Chapter 299 Disappointed Finished Daphne stepped in, holding a food box. Her voice was mild and sweet. "The weather's colder. I worried about you. I had the kitchen make supplements, something nourishing for you." Alaric lifted his eyes and stared at her, expression turning sharp. "Daphne.

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It was you, wasn't it?" Daphne blinked, lost. "Your Highness... what do you mean?" Alaric's voice turned colder with each word. "I told you to pass a message. To tell Elowen that Cassian kept a mistress. And you've been living in the Crown Prince's Wing day and night." Daphne still looked confused. Alaric's certainty hardened anyway. "No one else could've done it." He spoke through clenched teeth. "You resented me for not sleeping with you. So you sabotaged things. You twisted the message. And you leaked my movements and my plan." Daphne's head spun. Tears welled instantly. "Your Highness!

I've been devoted to you, heaven knows it. How could I betray you? That day, I told the Duchess exactly what didn't change a single, " "Still lying," Alaric snapped. you instructed. I He swept his arm across the desk and knocked books and brushes to the floor. The mess scattered in a loud crash. Daphne's tears spilled harder. Devoted? In Alaric's last life, she'd sworn devotion too, then slept with a guard. He looked at her crying face and felt no pity, only disgust. The tears felt fake to him. "Tristan," Alaric ordered. "Deliver my command.

From now on, everyone in the Crown Prince's Wing treats the Crown Princess like an ordinary maid. Not a bite more food than a maid's portion. Not a thread more comfort." Daphne's eyes went wide. The food box fell from her hands. It hit the floor, and soup spilled everywhere. She was Crown Princess. And she was going to be fed like a servant? Worse, she hadn't done anything. 2/3 14:47 Sat, Apr 11 .. Chapter 299 Disappointed She was being punished for nothing. Daphne's lips trembled. "Your Highness, I..." Alaric cut her off.

"Say one more word and you won't even get the maid's portion." Daphne's face went pale. Tristan, shaken, tried to protest carefully. "Your Highness... that may be... improper..." Alaric flicked him a look. "If you feel sorry for her, give her your portion." Tristan went quiet. After a long breath, he said, "Yes, Your Highness." AF 3 F 2 F Ä 2 Ä "Now get out," Alaric shouted. "All of you." 38 Finished Daphne stumbled from the room, silent sobs trapped in her throat, terrified of making noise. Outside the study, Tristan lowered his voice. "Crown Princess, forgive him.

His Majesty punished him today. He'll be confined for a month and barred from court. He's taking it out on you." Daphne finally understood. His plan had failed. But what did that have to do with her? She'd been screamed at anyway. Then Tristan added, quietly, "I believe the Duchess of Duskmoor set this up. But His Highness refuses to believe it." 1.8K H 2 3/3 admin

Chapter 300 Revenge Daphne paused. "You mean... Elowen?" Alaric might not believe it, but Daphne did. She'd suspected, even at Sylvia's wedding, that the exposure of Azure's identity had been arranged from the shadows, Elowen's work. And now Daphne had been shoved into humiliation because of her. Hatred pooled in Daphne's eyes. Finished One day, I'll make sure you fall from that high horse of yours-and when you do, everyone will be there to laugh. And

when she did, Daphne would be there to watch everyone laugh. A few days later, Sylvia's return visit arrived.

Since she'd married from Duskmoor Manor, she returned here by custom. Elowen rose early.

While she sat at the mirror getting ready, Cassian leaned in, thoughtful. "Ella," he said, "when you married me, I was unconscious. You returned to your family alone." Elowen nodded.

"Right." Cassian frowned. "I should've gone with you." Then, as if making a decision, he said, "Let me make it up to you. In a couple days. Okay?" Elowen nodded easily. "Okay." Cassian looked satisfied and kissed her.

Once she was ready, Elowen gathered her attendants and went to meet Elspeth, and together they headed to the front hall. Not long after, Piers arrived with Sylvia. They greeted Elowen and Elspeth properly. Then Piers went to pay respects to Cassian by custom. Sylvia stayed behind with Elowen and Elspeth to drink coffee and talk. 1/4 14:47 Sat, Apr 11 Chapter 300 Revenge :. Elowen looked Sylvia over with warm satisfaction. She wore a pomegranate-crimson gown of rich brocade, its fabric woven with winding floral patterns that shimmered subtly in the light.

In her hair rested a set of red-gold ornaments set with deep rubies, their glow warm against the dark strands. Her skin was smooth and luminous, like fine porcelain, carrying a natural flush that lent softness to her features, the delicate color of early spring blossoms just touched by the gentle warmth of the season. Sylvia's doing well at Falconcrest Manor. Elspeth grinned. "So. Wedding night. How was it? Did it hurt or did it feel good?" Sylvia went rigid, face flaming. "I... I..." Elspeth waved it off like it was nothing. "We're all married women.

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Talking about it privately is normal." Sylvia looked like she wanted the floor to open and swallow her. Elowen sat there with her warm cup and watched, entertained. Then Elspeth's eyes slid toward her. "Actually, when you and Cassian were at Sunspire Hill that many days, I'm guessing you two had a great time." Elowen's face went pale instantly. Elspeth's tone stayed completely serious. "Why are you blushing? The important thing now is getting pregnant. You need a big healthy boy, and you need him soon." Right then, Gerda came in to announce, "The marquess is here." Elspeth's smile froze.

Gerda hesitated and added, "He brought someone." Irritation flickered through Elspeth's eyes. Elowen said, "If you don't want to see them, we can send them away." a Elspeth's mouth turned cold. "It's Sylvia's return visit. If they show up now and I throw them out, how does that look?" Elowen nodded once. "Gerda, tell them to come later." Gerda bowed and went to deliver the message. 2/4 14:47 Sat, Apr 11 ... Chapter 300 Revenge The three women returned to conversation.

38 Finished Elowen had wanted to keep Piers and Sylvia for a meal, but they planned to go to Aldric's grave to pay respects, so Elowen didn't force them to stay. After they left, Gerda returned, expression complicated. "The marquess is waiting in the side hall. He says sif he doesn't see you, he won't leave." Elowen looked at Elspeth. Elspeth gave a sharp laugh. "Fine. Let them come. Let's hear what nonsense he wants to spill." Not long after, Alistair arrive with Lydia. Elspeth didn't even let Alistair speak. "Say it.

Why are you here?" Lydia stepped forward first, dipping into a graceful bow. She was dressed simply today, soft and restrained, voice gentle. "Elspeth... these past days, you've stayed at Duskmoor Manor and refused to go home. Alistair misses you. He can't sleep. He barely eats."

Elowen glanced at Alistair. He did look thinner, more worn. Elspeth's eyes sharpened. "You know he can't sleep at night?" Elowen blinked. That is... a very pointed way to interpret that. e Lydia dropped her eyes, voice still meek. "Alistair always tells Nina stories at night.

Since you've been gone, he hasn't done it. I've thought about it over and over, and... this is my fault. I stayed too close to him, and it upset you. I've made my decision. I'll take Nina and leave the marquess's estate. We'll live on our own. We won't bother either of you anymore." Elspeth's expression stayed cold. "No, don't do that. If you leave, won't he be devastated? Then afterward he'll blame me and say I'm petty and jealous and can't tolerate anyone." Alistair let out a sigh. "Elspeth, you always misunderstand me. This is something Lydia and I discussed together. She's sincere.

She wants you and me to be okay." 3/4 admin